A SQUARE PEG IN A ROUND HOLE: A CASE STUDY OF CENTER OF

GRAVITY APPLICATION IN COUNTER INSURGENCY WARFARE

BY

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APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

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The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.

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ABSTRACT

Effective planning and strategy development are dependent upon reliable, relevant, and accurate methodologies and practices. Critical to planning effective strategies is knowing the enemy, and understanding its elemental aspects. Non-state actors and insurgent activity have increased globally in scale, lethality and reach. At the same time, the frequency of state-on-state and major theater conflicts has declined. These trends necessitate a more fundamental understanding of who these individuals and groups are, why they do what they do, and how best to develop counter-strategies. Traditional military planning processes begin by identifying the enemy CoG, or hub on which all power is derived. The question is whether senior civil and military leaders are best served, and if counterinsurgency (COIN) strategies are most effective, utilizing a modeling paradigm historically based on conventional warfare and state-based actors. Underlying questions related to the research question are: Is there a CoG in an insurgency? Does this CoG differ from those of traditional state-based opponents? How does one identify a CoG in an insurgency, and once identified, how is it best dealt with? These questions, and the role of CoG in COIN, played central characters in the failing state of Iraq following President Bush's announcement of the end of major combat operations. Traditional and institutional perspectives and biases influenced civil and military leaders' assumptions about Iraq, the strategic environment, the people, and the enemy. In turn, CoG analysis, application, and assessment were skewed. The case study of this thesis illustrates the evolution of the perception and application of CoG in the COIN effort in Iraq by the different commanders charged with developing a successful, long-term campaign strategy. This thesis asserts that, by better understanding whether CoG is effective in understanding and combating insurgents and armed groups, and perhaps questioning if the concept should be modified or abandoned, strategists will be better able to refine and adapt their concepts, analyses and processes.

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Introduction

Importance and Relevance

      The U.S. has long dominated conventional war-fighting on land, air, and sea. This dominance has led to a belief the American system of combined arms warfare is the *best* way to fight. This belief perpetuates doctrine and practices that support this lofty idea of conventional dominance. In the U.S., senior civil and military leaders have crafted national security and foreign policy objectives based on a belief their military instrument of power is the best at what it does. At the same time, the frequency, and for the time being, the likelihood of state-on-state, conventional conflicts have declined. This dominance in conventional warfare has created a paradigm in how the U.S. military plans and executes the wars it fights. This dominant paradigm persists so long as the adversaries we fight counter in a conventional manner. Peter Mansoor addresses the enemy's conundrum when he states, "No nation can match the awesome conventional technological capabilities of the U.S. armed forces. So why try?"[1] If the U.S. is this dominant, logic dictates potential enemies should respond unconventionally, or through some asymmetric, irregular manner.

      One type of irregular warfare is insurgency. Most modern insurgency theories are population-centric, and consider the people's social, political, and economic grievances to be the foremost causes.[2] The strength of insurgency comes from its ability to persistently infuse problems for conventional forces across multiple, broad fronts. Insurgent forces most often avoid pitched battles, using indirect methods, while choosing when and where to fight, and for how long. They are known for their ability to avoid identification, wreaking havoc for intelligence forces

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[1] Peter Mansoor, *Baghdad at Sunrise: A Brigade Commander's War in Iraq* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 342.

[2] Mark Moyar, *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 3.

and planners reliant upon that intelligence to develop strategy. This ability to hide in and among the people often enables insurgents to counter conventional tactics, techniques, and procedures. More importantly, this intangible nature of insurgency generates significant challenges to designing and planning an effective long-term counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy.

The U.S. military has enormous capacity for strategic, operational, and tactical planning. Success on the battlefield and the longer-term strategic victory are incumbent upon this planning and its effective linkages between the levels of war. It has become the backbone of joint interoperability between services, and the allied nations alongside which the U.S. fights. Synchronization of all of these elements requires a complex array of staffs, branches, and cells; every aspect of this intricate array is dependent upon design and planning frameworks and processes. Through the application of established methods, along with the intellectual efforts of planning and design staffs, the military machine attempts to churn out an effective, executable strategy. Amongst this web of planning art and science lies arguably one of its most important tools for creating strategy.

Center of gravity, or "CoG", is a basis of analysis and means of focusing theoretical and pragmatic thought, as well as national resources, to shorten war. For centuries, it has been the focal point for planning, from the highest levels of grand strategy to the forward edge of the battlefield. As the character of war in the U.S. has evolved along more conventional lines, so have its constituent parts. CoG is no exception. The perception of CoG, as well as its analysis, application, and assessment, have become conventionally focused. As is demonstrated in Chapter 1, numerous elements have influenced this interpretation of CoG. Some have to do with what many consider Clausewitz's confusing theory of war, compounded by a confusing,

ambiguous, and contradictory methodology. Other influences have to do with multiple interpretations and variances of the concept of CoG itself.

The nature of war applies universally across all its forms and types, including insurgency. Following that logic, the theory and function of war strategy, as well as its developmental tools, reflect war's nature. This illustrates the linkage between insurgency, its character, and CoG. What may be less obvious is the importance this link represents. Since 2001, the U.S. has been embroiled in an irregular war on multiple fronts, with seemingly no end in sight. While the enemy is new, this irregular form of warfare is something the U.S. has struggled with for hundreds of years. Yet the most recent experience in Iraq, for example, would indicate the U.S. has learned little or forgotten how best to engage in counterinsurgent warfare. Similarly, CoG has been used by military strategists and planners for the better part of the century. Senior civilian and military leaders and those responsible for strategy development claim to be well versed in the meaning and application of CoG as "the hub of all power and movement."[3] That said, it is difficult to understand why the U.S. has been unable to unlock the secrets of CoG to create long-term, strategic success against the insurgencies in either Iraq or Afghanistan.

CoG and insurgency intersect at the point where national powers pursue the development of an effective, long-term COIN strategy. Conspiring against this strategy are the emergent characteristics of CoG and insurgency, creating a complex, wicked problem. Conquering this problem requires a strategist to first understand the components and characteristics of CoG and insurgency, and their interdependent relationships. Lack of a fundamental appreciation for the theoretical and

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[3] Jan L. Rueschhoff and Jonathan P. Dunne. "Centers of Gravity from the Inside Out," *Joint Force Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2011): 120-125. See also Joseph L. Strange, "Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clauswitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language," *Perspectives on Warfighting Series No.* 4, 2d Ed., (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Association, 1996), 2.

practical strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of CoG can lead to a short-sighted and inaccurate perception of insurgency and why certain counter-strategies fail.

This thesis is a critical analysis of the U.S. COIN effort in Iraq as it was conceived, planned, and executed from 2003 to 2008. Specifically, it evaluates how the concept of CoG was used in the strategic planning processes of different commands, staffs, and planning cells throughout the evolving insurgency in Iraq. The case study evaluates leadership, actions, and planning in these various commands. Further, and more specifically, it provides a comprehensive examination of the use and perception of CoG in that planning. The lessons learned and applied throughout each phase, by both the insurgents and the U.S., should provide a new perspective as to how CoG has been used in Iraq and may be used in the future of COIN operations.

Thesis Question: Primary and Sub-Questions

The challenge undertaken here is the analysis of CoG's use in the joint planning process as a means to comprehend and fight an insurgency. More pointedly, it assesses how well the U.S. understood and combated the insurgency in Iraq in the immediate aftermath of a successful conventional military campaign. The analysis of how well CoG was integrated, assessed, and applied by the U.S. during this time will help answer the larger central question.

The intellectual journey from theory to strategy and execution is rooted in one fundamental question: Is the concept of CoG useful and sufficient in understanding and combating insurgencies? Existing CoG models and frameworks used in planning are largely focused on state-based adversaries, and arguably they fail to grasp the complex number of actors and changing conditions in an insurgency. Many leading authors on military strategy refute these claims, citing CoG's longevity and applicability. Doctors Joe Strange and Antulio Echevarria have attempted to demonstrate that CoG analysis is still useful by proposing

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new interpretations of this aged concept. This thesis will examine whether CoG is still useful in understanding insurgencies, whether it requires modification, or needs replacing with a better metaphor.

Methodology and Roadmap

This thesis examines CoG and its application to insurgency from a theoretical perspective. The first chapter articulates the key elements of CoG. It examines the origin of Clausewitz's concept of CoG. The chapter places emphasis on how Clausewitz was influenced, by whom, and what shaped his creation of CoG. It also provides a comparative analysis of Strange's and Echevarria's interpretations of CoG. This analysis illustrates the similarities and differences between the two interpretations, and shows why Clausewitz's concept has become so perplexing. It also identifies the key elements of what makes CoG useful in strategic planning.

After establishing baseline understanding of CoG in the first chapter, Chapter 2 offers a detailed synopsis of insurgency. It establishes the common ground allowing the reader to better understand the intricacies of insurgency. The chapter provides a framework that synthesizes the linkages between CoG and insurgency. First, the *nature* of war and the character of insurgency is evaluated along with the diversity that comes with this irregular type of war. Next, this thesis examines the various contexts from which to view insurgencies. Part of this is recognizing the social, political, ideological, tribal, religious, and other aspects of insurgency that comprise the context. Chapter two sheds light on questions such as: what are common insurgent objectives, what are the rationales for fighting, and how do they fight. It also details various insurgent and COIN strategies used in the past, both successfully and unsuccessfully. Lastly, the study tackles the extremely dynamic environment within which the insurgent operates. This chapter illustrates the complexity of the operating environment as a means to

better understand how the insurgent organizes, operates, and sustains their cause through the people.

The essential elements of CoG and insurgency outlined in chapters one and two provide the foundation for a contemporary case study investigation. Chapters three through five examine the Iraqi insurgency in its various phases to assess how CoG was used in understanding and combating insurgency. The study articulates the evolution of insurgency and COIN operations in Iraq from April 2003 to July 2008. The case study is supported through research utilizing official U.S. Army, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) and Multi-National Forces-Iraq (MNF-I) post-action reports and individual interviews with MNF-I staff planners staff. Chapter 3 begins by addressing conditions prior to and during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, establishing how the social, political, and tribal elements affected the instability and security of Iraq. The analysis illustrates how an ineffective termination phase doomed the U.S. and its allies to a protracted war.

Each chapter of this case study explores a discreet phase of the insurgency. The phases are labeled "Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA)," "Divided Command," and "The Surge." Chapter 3, *CPA,* provides a description of the nature of the Iraqi insurgency, along with initial causes, objectives, elements, and leadership core. It illustrates how a lack of prior planning for post-conflict operations derailed Lieutenant General Sanchez as the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, when the insurgency began to take shape. The chapter also focuses on CPA, and its responsibility for leading stability and reconstruction efforts, and why those failed.

Chapter 4, *Divided Command*, depicts the highly dynamic nature of the insurgency and surveys its evolution. It addresses U.S.COIN strategy, the adjustments made by General George Casey as commander of MNF-I to deal with a responsive and diffuse insurgent "system," and the effects those adjustments had. Specific attention is paid to the

strategy developed and implemented during this time, and the assumptions behind CoG analysis, particularly as the command structures changed from Combined Joint-Task Force 7 (CJTF-7) and CPA to MNF-I. The adjustments in leadership, strategies, and tactics on both sides of the conflict showcase how rapidly and unexpectedly the character of insurgent war can change.

The final phase of the case study, Chapter 5 or *The Surge*, looks at how CoG analysis changed, beginning with the unambiguous assessment by senior civil and military leaders of the COIN conflict in Iraq up 2006. From this assessment, the military and civilian leadership developed a strategic solution based on a comprehensive CoG analysis that carried through until 2008 where this case study ends. In particular, this chapter showcases the realization on the part of these leaders that long-term strategic success required more than short-term battlefield victory. Specifically, the leadership demonstrated by General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker demanded not only a fundamental rethinking of the problem in Iraq, but also the need for an integrated approach. This approach, based on a wide-ranging and more expansive CoG analysis, sought to bring together all COIN elements in a comprehensive way to achieve success against insurgency. It also underlines that even the best solution requires intellectual rigor, flexibility, acceptance of risk, sacrifice, and a degree of timing and luck.

Chapter 1

Center of Gravity

The truth is that the mistrust of theory arises from a misconception of what it is that theory claims to do…Its main practical value is that it can assist a capable man to acquire a broad outlook whereby he may be the surer his plan shall cover all the ground, and whereby he may with greater rapidity and certainty seize all the factors of a sudden situation.

-- Sir Julian S. Corbett

Introduction

A frequent problem with complex ideas is they are often misunderstood and misapplied. Carl von Clausewitz's seminal work *On War* is one example. An instance of confusion in *On War* comes from Clausewitz's use of scientific metaphor in what he calls the center of gravity (CoG). Some view CoG as vital to any design of strategy and while others see it as an antiquated planning tool, insufficient to meet the needs of a commander. More often than not, both assertions are cast without the requisite knowledge of what CoG is or what it does. This chapter begins with an examination of how CoG was defined conceptually and practically by Clausewitz in his theory of war. It also addresses two contemporary authors' distinctive and, in their opinion, more accurate and useful interpretations of CoG. As this chapter demonstrates, these interpretations appear to diverge from Clausewitz and yet they essentially support his foundational ideas. The similarities and differences serve as reminders of the need to comprehend conceptual tools like CoG before trying to use them and managing the gap which exists between such tools in theory and practice.

Clausewitz, *On War*, and Center of Gravity

Published in 1832, *On War* remains the preeminent source for professional military officers seeking a more fundamental understanding

of war and strategy. Clausewitz drafted and edited *On War* from 1816 to 1830. It remained a work in progress until the time of his death in 1831. He sought to impart objective knowledge through his scientific theory on war.[1] Skeptical of rote application and prescriptive rules, Clausewitz emphasized the importance of recognizing and developing the critical linkages of and in war.[2] Part of his intent was for the reader to extract from his work the complex interdependent relationship of several aspects of war including battle, commander's judgment, and fog and friction. Many elements of Clausewitz's theory were deliberately left open to interpretation to allow for continued conceptual evolution and revision. Just as he says that "in war the result is never final," he would most likely apply the same perspective to theory and paradigms.[3] Another theorist, Julian Corbett, followed in Clausewitz's ideas and supported the need for theoretical evolution when he stated:

> "The last thing that an explorer arrives at is a complete map that will cover the whole ground he has travelled, but for those who come after him and would profit by and extend his knowledge, his map is the first thing with which they will begin."[4]

It is this intellectual map that Clausewitz has created for the reader to critically view and apply to the study and waging war. *On War* and the concepts it puts forward are the first steps in this explorer's journey. However, given its incomplete nature, its value as an intellectual departure point has also been called into question.

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[1] Jon Sumida, *Decoding Clausewitz: A New Approach to On War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 100.

[2] For the sources of Clausewitz's skepticism see Raymond Aron, *Clausewitz: Philosopher of War*, Christine Book and Norman Stone, trans. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall), 41-45.

[3] This chapter leans heavily on the contemporary accepted standard translation of Clausewitz's work which was translated and edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret in 1976. The material quoted above is from this edition of *On War*, Howard and Paret trans. and ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 80.

[4] Julian Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Inst. Pr., 1988), 15.

On War has been criticized as ambiguous and confusing. There are several sources for this ambiguity. One source is translation from German to English which introduces room for misinterpretation.[5] Another reason for confusion stems from the fact that *On War* was incomplete at the time of Clausewitz's death. He was in the process of revising it according to emerging thoughts. Unfortunately, only Clausewitz's first and last books were completed according to his reevaluation but the manuscript was edited and published with the body chapters relatively unchanged. Perhaps the principle reason many find *On War* dense is Clausewitz's methodology. He employed a dialectic method as a means to achieve an understanding of war. This method has been described as "the change in which the concept or its realization passes over into and is preserved and fulfilled by its opposite."[6] Put simply, by contrasting an idea with its opposite, a deeper meaning about its nature was possible. Clausewitz employed this method by comparing a conceptual notion of war (war in its *ideal),* versus war in reality (*real* war).

Clausewitz also relied on metaphors as conceptual illustrations to develop his theory. Just as he used dialectics as a means for greater comprehension, Clausewitz drew upon other sciences and philosophies to convey what he saw as the complexities of war.[7] This influenced him to look toward Newtonian physics as a means to better understand the linkages between the components of war. The physical sciences define

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[5] The translations themselves range from good to poor. This thesis relies heavily on the standard modern translation by Peter Paret and Michael Howard. Other English language translations were done by J.J. Graham (1873), O.J. Matthijs Jolles (1943), and Anatol Rapoport (1968). The Graham translation, along with the original German for comparison, is available online at http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/OnWar 1873/TOC.htm#TOC.

[6] *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003), s.v. "Dialectic Method."

[7] Antulio J. Echevarria, II, "Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: It's Not What We Thought," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. LVI, No. 1 (Winter 2003) 110, http://www.au.af.mil/au/ awc/awcgate/navy/art4-w03.htm

CoG as "the point at which the entire weight of a body may be considered as concentrated so that if supported at this point, the body would remain in equilibrium in any position."[8]

Clausewitz discusses CoG in two books of *On War:* book six and book eight.[9] In book six, Clausewitz defines CoG as:

> A center of gravity is always found where the mass is concentrated most densely. It presents the most effective target for a blow; furthermore, the heaviest blow is that struck by the center of gravity. The same holds true in war. …Thus, these forces will possess certain centers of gravity, which by their movement and direction, govern the rest; and those centers of gravity will be found wherever the forces are most concentrated.[10]

One source of confusion on CoG stems from the differences between his depiction in book six and book eight. Clausewitz's discusses multiple CoGs in book six and much of his focus is on battlefield forces and the means to maneuver and sustain them. Book eight defines CoG in a different way:

> What the theorist has to say here is this: one must keep the dominant characteristics of both belligerents in mind. Out of these characteristics a certain center of gravity develops the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which all our energies should be directed.[11]

This description illustrates a single, strategic CoG, and one that seems to be more theoretical in nature. Here the reader is trapped between

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[8] *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003), s.v. "Center of Gravity." For a contemporary scientific definition of CoG, See also Cole P. Kessel and D. Johnson, "*The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity* in *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives,*" Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1992. Danish translation, "Selvet som fortællingens tyngdepunkt," *Philosophia*, 15, (1986), 275-88.

[9] Seow Hiang Lee, "Center of Gravity or Center of Confusion Understanding the Mystique," *The Wright Flyer Papers,* Paper #10 (1999): 3. See also Echevarria, "Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: It's Not What We Thought," 110.

[10] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 485.

[11] Clausewitz, *On War*, 596.

Clausewitz's discussion of war at different levels (strategic versus tactical) as well as between theoretical (a single center) versus the real (more than one center). For these reasons it is little wonder that Clausewitz continues to inspire and frustrate at the same time. As the next section suggests, there are interpretations of CoG that differ in scope and substance.

Comparative Analysis of Interpretations: Dr. Joe Strange

No interpretation of CoG better represents the practical school of thought than the writings of Dr. Joe Strange. Strange, a former professor of strategic studies at the U.S. Marine Corps War College, cuts through the confusion and contradictions related to CoG by translating it functionally for the war-fighter. He does this through a methodology he labels as the *CG-CC-CR-CV Model.* According to Strange, CoGs are "the primary sources of moral or physical strength, power and resistance."[12] He cuts straight to the point of CoGs by saying they "don't just contribute to strength; they *are* the strength."[13] By breaking CoG down into separate component elements, Strange suggests that it is possible to break free from the fool's errand of divining CoG intuitively.[14]

The first and most basic part of Strange's methodology is Critical Capabilities (CC). According to Strange, CCs are the action contained within the CoG itself. More precisely, it is a "primary ability (or abilities)

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[12] Strange, "Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clauswitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language," 3. See also Joint Operation Planning (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, December 26, 2006), IV–8.

[13] Strange, "Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clauswitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language," 7. See also Milan N. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Newport, RI.: Naval War College, 2007), VII-13. Dr Vego supports Strange's assertion that CoG is a strength; states that "…a CoG is that source of massed strength-physical or moral, or a source of leverage-whose serious degradation, dislocation, neutralization or destruction would have the most decisive impact on the enemy's or one's own ability to accomplish a given military objective."

[14] Strange, "Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clauswitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language," 7. See also Dale C. Eikmeier, Colonel, U.S. Army, "Center of Gravity Analysis," *Military Review* (July – August 2004): 3, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/eikmeier.pdf. Discusses role of CoG in relation to Critical Factors and role within the matrix.

that makes [the CoG] a center of gravity in the context of a given scenario... it can *destroy* something, or *seize* an objective, or *prevent* you from achieving a mission."[15]

Identification of CCs leads to the recognition of the second part of the methodology, Critical Requirements (CR). Strange explains CRs are elements that enable the CoG to be a CoG by facilitating it to perform the CC. He defines CRs as "conditions, resources and means that are essential for a center of gravity to achieve its critical capability."[16]

The third component in Strange's model that leads to a deductive understand of CoG is Critical Vulnerability (CV). Strange articulates the CVs as "those critical requirements, or components thereof that are deficient, or vulnerable to neutralization or defeat in a way that will contribute to a center of gravity failing to achieve its critical capability."[17]

Strange's methodology makes Clausewitz's scientific metaphor accessible and useful to war-fighters at the tactical and operational level. For this approach Strange relies on a book six (of *On War*) interpretation of CoG, one that is very concrete and utilitarian.[18] He clearly associates CoG with the physical and tangible. Therefore CoG can and should be influenced physically through the direct application of force.[19] How does

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[15] Strange, "Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clauswitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language," 7.

[16] Strange, "Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clauswitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language," 7. See also Tim Keppler, Lt Col, U.S. Army, "Center of Gravity Determination and Implications for The War Against Radical Islamic Terrorism" (Strategy Research Project Paper, U.S. Army War College, 2005), 8. Provides graphical representation of Critical Factors and interaction between elements.

[17] Strange, "Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clauswitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language," 7. See also John Blackwell, Maj, U.S. Air Force, "Rebuilding Baghdad: Restoring Essential Services And Reducing Anti-State Forces." (Master's Thesis, Air Command and Staff College, 2008), 1,3 and 26. Discussion of critical factors germane to Iraq during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

[18] Strange, "Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clauswitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language," 2.

[19] Strange, "Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clauswitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language," 2. See also Cheryl L.

Strange deal with the question of an enemy that has no *clear* physical means to resist? The answer to this is rooted in Clausewitz's depiction of CoG in book eight.

As much as book six delved into the tactical aspects of war, Strange suggests that book eight views war and CoG through the broader lens of "national and coalition (or grand) strategy."[20] This view goes far beyond the authority of the war-fighter and provides a different perspective of CoG. Strange suggests forthrightly that book eight creates unnecessary confusion for two reasons. The first has to do with translation error. According to Strange, Howard and Paret's version has a number of mistranslations that alter Clausewitz's intent. Second, some interpretations of CoG may have been taken out of context. Strange supports the common assertion that *On War* was not published in the order it was written, but rather a sequence selected by the editors. The net effect of this editing is confusion relative to context of book, chapter, page, and paragraph.[21] Despite this disorder, Strange cuts through the ambiguity to arrive at a dual-natured metaphor instead--one that allows a deeper appreciation and understanding of Clausewitz's theoretical components.

Strange develops the idea of *moral CoGs* to fill the gap in his methodology. Moral CoGs are critical to Strange's interpretation in that they serve as an intellectual link between war in reality and war in its

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Hetherington, "Modeling Transnational Terrorists' Center Of Gravity: An Elements of Influence Approach." (Master's Thesis, Air Force Institute of Technology, School of Engineering and Management, 2005), 3-25. Discussion of contemporary examples of influence on CoG with regard to trans-national terrorism.

[20] Strange, "Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clauswitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language," 4.

[21] James Schneider and Lawrence Izzo, "Clausewitz's Elusive Center of Gravity," *Parameters* (September 1987): 46. http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location =U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf&AD=ADA509969. See Also Alan Beyerchen, "Clausewitz, Nonlinearity and the Unpredictability of War," *International Security*, 17:3 (Winter, 1992), pp. 59. See also Raymond Aron, *Clausewitz* (London: Routledge &Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 53-70. See also Strange, "Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clauswitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language," 4.

ideal. Strange illustrates the importance and relative weight of these moral CoGs by stating that they outnumber physical CoGs by a factor of three to one.[22] He adds that "[T]he moral elements are the most important in war. They constitute the spirit that permeates war as a whole, and at an early stage they establish a close affinity with the will that moves and leads the whole mass of force."[23] Strange goes on to say that the two central elements common to the moral CoGs reside in the ability to command resources to fight and the will to fight.[24] Identifying these moral CoGs involves a process that Strange says "begins and ends with people – only people can create and sustain moral resistance. These 'people' can be arranged into three general categories: The leader, the ruling elite, and a strong-willed population."[25] Strange's process, and the categories he highlights, suggest an underlying complexity to the dual nature of CoG.

The methodology that Strange derives is predicated on the duality of CoG. In some wars, depending on the context and circumstances, a moral CoG may play a more central role. In other more conventional, state-on-state conflicts, the focus may lie more on physical CoGs. While the physical and moral forms of CoG each have unique characteristics, they both share distinctive features. According to Strange, physical and moral CoGs share the following:

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[22] Strange, "Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clauswitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language," 10.

[23] Strange, "Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clauswitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language,"10. See also Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 5. Provides example of how a force's will to fight being identified as the CoG; details General George Washington's assessment of the British force's will being the CoG.

[24] Strange, "Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clauswitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language," 12.

[25] Strange, "Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clauswitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language," 12. See also William G. Pierce and Robert Coon, "Understanding the Link Between Center of Gravity and Mission Accomplishment," *Military Review* (May-June 2007): 76-84, http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/dmspo/Publications/Center%20of%20Gravity%20Article.pdf

- They're dynamic, positive, active agents. (Think people, in formations and groups, or as individuals.)
- They're obvious. (Physical CoGs usually more so than moral CoGs, depending on the richness of one's intelligence.)
- They're powerful and strike effective, if not heavy, blows.[26]

These shared features of CoG tie Strange's interpretation together. More importantly, they illustrate that for Strange, CoGs are not merely passive, static targets, but agents capable of action.

Strange draws a distinct difference between books six and eight of *On War*. Book six is straight-forward in regard to the physical nature of CoG at the tactical or operational level. Clausewitz approaches CoG in book eight in a more theoretical manner, or what Strange refers to as a moral, strategic CoG. Ultimately, Strange gives more weight and importance to moral CoGs although he points out that the two CoGs have important, shared characteristics that reflect both the dual nature of war (real and ideal) and the linkages between them. Clausewitz recognized this link and how if one thinks about war from only one perspective, the view is undoubtedly myopic. This failure to contrast methodologies impairs the processes necessary for the design of strategy. As Michael Handel stated in his work *Masters of War*, "The value of comparative analysis is that it demonstrates the basic unity of the study of strategy and war, and also allows us to better understand these works on their own terms."[27]

Comparative Analysis of Interpretations: Dr. Antulio Echevarria

Another recognized interpreter of Clausewitz's work is Dr. Antulio Echevarria. Echevarria is the Director of Research for the United States Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute. What distinguishes his

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[26] Strange, "Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clauswitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language," 15.

[27] Michael I. Handel, *Masters Of War: Classical Strategic Thought.* 3rd rev. and exp. ed. (London: F. Cass, 2001), 4.

ideas from Strange is that they revolve around a more literal interpretation of CoG. Echevarria asserts that this literal interpretation of Clausewitz's use of physics provides a means to better understand CoG. According to Echevarria, Clausewitz did not ascribe a value to CoG and therefore did not see it in terms of a strength or weakness. A key premise of Echevarria's is that CoG is a force that creates and maintains cohesion of the system or structure.[28]

Echevarria's perspective of CoG, much like Strange's, is heavily influenced by what he sees as shortcomings or misperceptions of existing interpretations. One of these shortcomings is how CoG has been a function of each service component's own field of expertise.[29] Echevarria asserts that this partisan view of CoG is extremely detrimental to planning and fighting wars. The process, analysis, and resultant CoG are ultimately dependent on the service component that functions as the planning staff. Echevarria then demonstrates just how wide the gap is in interpretation between the services. For example, "CoG's, for the Marines, are now any important sources of strength."[30] He points out the United States Air Force (USAF) has historically focused on "strategic and operational critical points, [and] has identified so many CoG's as to reduce the concept to absurdity."[31] Echevarria's reasoning is equally

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[28] Antulio J. Echevarria II, *"Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: Changing Our Warfighting Doctrine-Again!"* (Carlisle: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, (September 2002), iii.

[29] Antulio J. Echevarria, II*, "Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: It's Not What We Thought," Naval War College Review, Vol. LVI, No. 1 (Winter 2003) 109, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/navy/art4-w03.htm*

[30] Echevarria*, "Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: It's Not What We Thought,"* 107. See also Bowman, Michael, Lt Col. U.S. Army, "Center Of Gravity Analysis: Preparing For Intelligent Agents." (USAWC Strategy Research Project. U.S. Army War College, 2001), 9.

[31] Echevarria*, "Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: It's Not What We Thought,"* 107. See also Milan Vego, "Clausewitz's Schwerpunkt: Mistranslated from German – Misunderstood in English," *Military Review*, (January-February 2007), 104. Vego illustrates historical precedence of German Army utilizing multiple CoG's. See Also John A. Warden, "Air Theory for the Twenty-First Century," in *Battlefield of the Future: Twenty-First Century Warfare Issues*, September 1995, http://www.airpower.maxwell.

illustrated in his assessment of the U.S. Army's approach to design and planning:

> "The U.S. Army, which has the role of fighting campaigns and winning wars, sees the enemy's center of gravity as his source of strength. Accordingly, the Army tends to look for a single center of gravity, normally in the principal capability that stands in the way of the accomplishment of its own mission."[32]

It's difficult to imagine that strategic analysis and planning can be anything but effective. Echevarria links the service faults to other, more intrinsic challenges with CoG.

Echevarria also agrees with Strange in his belief that partial blame for errors in CoG analysis lie in faulty translation of *On War*. Where he differs from Strange, however, is in the implications that his three primary complaints raise about the English translated edition of *On War* used in most military colleges. First, he claims the edition strips away the important physics metaphor that Clausewitz originally intended. Secondly, he asserts Howard and Paret have created the perception CoGs derive from *sources* of strength, or that they themselves are *strengths*.[33] According to Echevarria, Clausewitz never used the term *source* nor did he impose the title of strength upon CoG.[34] Lastly, he argues that Howard and Paret's edition makes CoG appear "static and as having a lack of dynamic."[35] Like Strange, Echevarria takes issue with errors

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af.mil/airchronicles/battle/chp4.html for reference on Col Warden's development of operational CoG's and his "Five Rings" Model.

[32] Echevarria, *"Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: It's Not What We Thought,"* 110.

[33] Echevarria, *"Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: It's Not What We Thought,"* 110.

[34] Echevarria, *"Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: It's Not What We Thought,"* 110. See also Robert C. Johnson, "Joint Campaign Design: Using a Decide-Detect-Attack (DDA) Methodology to Synchronize the Joint Force's Capabilities Against Enemy Centers of Gravity." (Master's Thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, School of Advanced Military Studies,1994) 9. Illustrates perspective of "source" and "strength" from U.S. Army perspective, and the context within which it is used.

[35] Echevarria, *"Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: It's Not What We Thought,"* 110. See also Thomas Waldman, "Politics and War: Clausewitz's Paradoxical Equation." *Parameters* (September 2010): 5. http://www.carlisle.army.mil/USAWC/parameters/Articles/2010 autumn/Waldman.pdf. Waldman supports Echevarria by noting that the linkage

induced through interpretation and translation. At this point the two authors diverge in their depiction of CoG.

Echevarria's impression of CoG lies firmly rooted in the notion that modern armies need to re-evaluate their perceptions of war. His assertion is that the U.S. is too heavily vested in seeing war as comprised of three levels: the strategic, operational, and tactical. These levels of war, in turn, dictate how the services organize, train, equip, and execute. In other words, many U.S. military leaders focus unnecessarily on a single level of war and plan accordingly. Echevarria contends that *all* levels and *all* activities are interdependent.[36] Consequently, CoG should be analyzed and assessed holistically, evaluating the enemy not in vertical, hierarchical terms but rather as a complex and dynamic system. Echevarria's assessment of the problems leads him to a different conceptualization of CoG.

There are five pillars to Echevarria's concept of CoG. First, he views CoG as not in terms of strength or weakness but as a focal point instead. Second, CoG can only be identified where connections exist among various parts of the enemy system. The third fundamental component of Echevarria's idea is that CoG exerts a centripetal force that holds a structure or system together. The fourth, and most vital part, is that regardless of viewing CoG theoretically or pragmatically, the view of the enemy must be held holistically. Lastly, Echevarria states that Clausewitz's CoG concept is effects-based, and intrinsically dynamic, in

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between politics, war, and the complex linkage between the two; reinforcing Echevarria's notion that CoG is not static.

[36] Echevarria, *"Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: It's Not What We Thought,"* 118. See also David S. Fadok, "John Boyd And John Warden: Air Power's Quest For Strategic Paralysis." (Master's Thesis, U.S. Air Force, Air university, School of Advanced Airpower Studies, 1995). Thesis discusses the notion of interdependence of elements of CoG in relation to Col Warden's "Five Rings" Model and Col (ret) John Boyd's OODA Loop; all relative to treating the enemy from a systems approach.

its nature.[37] In order to fully understand CoGs one must grasp their linkages to other enemy components and determine potential second- and third-order effects of influencing them. This effects-based approach reflects a more current scientific interpretation of war, driven by systems design, engineering, and complexity science. As a result, Echevarria's interpretation of CoG is flexible by nature but it can be determined *only* by considering the enemy holistically. Echevarria suggests as a result that more than one CoG may exist, as part of a "system of systems." Divining a CoG or CoGs is not easy and, he argues, can only be done by the military genius. This genius supersedes and replaces any rote processes or templates to determine CoG that would be contrary to Clausewitz's distaste for prescriptive measures.

Most importantly for this thesis is Echevarria's idea on the relationship between CoG and irregular warfare. He implies that CoG has little or no value beyond unlimited war.[38] This implication stems from his view that in a limited war, such as a COIN effort, military and political objectives are not complementary. This incongruence, according to Echevarria, creates conflicting objectives and confusion over the outcome and strategic end-state.

Assessment

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[37] Echevarria*, "Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: It's Not What We Thought," 115.* See also Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2, *Organization and Employment of Aerospace Power,* 17 February 2000, 2-3. Document supports Echevarria's interpretation of CoG being effects-based when it defines effects at the Strategic level of war as being, "… destruction or disruption of enemy center(s) of gravity (CoG's) or other vital target sets, including command elements, war production assets, and key supporting infrastructure that impairs the enemy's ability or will to wage war or carry out aggressive activity." The document goes on to clarify the definition of operational level effects as, "…theater air superiority, command and control (C2) decapitation, and battlefield isolation…"

[38] Echevarria*, "Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: It's Not What We Thought," 118.* See also William D. Franklin, "Clausewitz on Limited War." *Military Review* (June 1967): 25. http://calldp.leavenworth.army.mil/eng_mr/txts/VOL47/00000006/art3.pdf (accessed February 12, 2011). Franklin refutes Echevarria's claim that CoG is not applicable to limited war when he states, "Clausewitz said that there were two things which, in practice, could take the place of the impossibility of further resistance …the improbability of success;[and]…an excessive price to pay for it. A war need not, therefore, always be fought out until one of the parties is overthrown."

Scholars like Echevarria and Strange attempt to penetrate the fog associated with difficult theoretical concepts such as CoG and provide a measure of clarity. Both authors agree that Clausewitz's discussion creates ambiguity and uncertainty. They also have the same opinion on other aspects of CoG as well: there are differences between the Armed Services on how they define and use CoG; these problems are a reflection of translation and interpretation errors of Clausewitz's original work; and, perhaps most importantly, these differences and problems have led to the mistaken perception of CoG as static in nature.[39] Ambiguity and problems do not mean that CoG should be dismissed or is unimportant. Strange and Echevarria both suggest that CoG is not only a salvageable concept but that it's a useful and necessary part of strategy development.

Where Echevarria and Strange differ is a reflection of the two principle schools of thought on strategy and planning in the United States. Their interpretations of CoG illustrate the differences between an effects-based or a capabilities-based approach to planning. According to Echevarria, Strange incorrectly defined CoG by associating it with, "those critical capabilities that enabled it [CoG] to function."[40] Strange links CCs to CoGs in order to show that what makes CoGs so important is their capabilities. Ultimately, Echevarria states that Strange's methodology assists planners not in determining the CoG but only the linkages between components that point to one.

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[39] Echevarria, *"Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: It's Not What We Thought*," 110. See also Milan Vego, "Clausewitz's Schwerpunkt: Mistranslated from German – Misunderstood in English," *Military Review*, (January-February 2007), 104. Vego supports both Strange and Echevarria that multiple translations and interpretations have created significant confusion regarding Clausewitz's original intent.

[40] Echevarria II, *"Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: Changing Our Warfighting Doctrine-Again!,"* 4. See also Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2-5, *Information Operations*, 4 Jan 2002; and Jim Caldwell, "MC02 experiment extends C4ISR to all services," (Virginia: TRADOC News Services, 26 June 2002); Available from http://www.army .mil/USAR/news/2002/07Jul/mcos=2.html;Internet; accessed 1 Feb 2003. Sources cite examples of how Echevarria developed his interpretation during this period of "Effects Based Operations" in the U.S. military.

Echevarria's effects-based interpretation of CoG is the more theoretical, nuanced one. According to him the greatest challenge in determining a CoG is identifying and understanding the interconnections that exist within the enemy system. These interconnections can only be understood by gathering and analyzing a significant amount of information and intelligence. Strands within a system are not as important as identifying the significance of the connections between them. Asking the right questions about the enemy, the battlespace, and their interdependence is critical in Echevarria's approach.[41] From these insights the commander can use his or her judgment to determine the CoG or focal point of the system and understand its strengths. In Echevarria's approach, the ability to achieve a specific, desired *effect* on this focal point translates to the defeat of the enemy.[42]

There are shortcomings in Echevarria's approach to CoG. These include the volume of information, the time and ability to gather and make of sense of it, and last but not least, the undue burden placed on the commander's intuitive judgment. In this case judgment takes on almost a mystical property: "[Effects-based operations] require a certain ability to predict how to achieve first, second, and third order effects."[43] One potential shortfall of this heavy reliance on both judgment and genius resides in the complexity of war itself. A commander must

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[41] Wendy H. Burkett, "Assessing The Results Of Effects-Based Operations (Ebo): The Relationship Between Effects-Based Operations And The Psychological Dimension Of Warfare." (Strategic Research Project, U.S. Army War College, 2003) 1. Burkett references the systems approach to EBO and interdependence of elements; as discussed by General William Kernan, Commander, U.S. Joint Forces Command; See also General William F. Kernan, U.S. Army, statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee, April 9, 2002, 14. See also Echevarria, "*Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: Changing Our Warfighting Doctrine-Again!,*" 11.

[42] Echevarria, "*Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: Changing Our Warfighting Doctrine-Again!,*" 12. See also Jordon T. Cochran, "Ten Propositions Regarding Cyberpower." (Master's Thesis, U.S. Air Force, Air University, School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, 2008), 3, 4, 21, 22. Cochran articulates multiple contemporary examples of the linkage between EBO and cyberwarfare, specifically, and its impact in influence operations, integrated control enablers, and in network warfare operations.

[43] Echevarria, "*Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: Changing Our Warfighting Doctrine-Again!,*" 12.

produce, communicate, and translate his judgment by means of modeling, process, subordinates, and organization. Clausewitz suggests that fog and friction within these various elements will only increase complexity and uncertainty within one's own system and lead to unanticipated outcomes.[44]

Echevarria's more intellectual approach to CoG makes no provision for or distinction between the strategic, operational, and the tactical levels of war.[45] In his scheme there cannot be separate CoGs at various levels. Acknowledging the possibility undermines the idea of an inherently interdependent system; different levels of war could therefore operate independently of one another. The concept of interdependency is at odds with almost all current models, methods, and processes (outlined below) used to determine CoG in the operational design and the planning stages of war. Completely removing and replacing all of these existing processes, which serve a functional purpose, is unnecessary and unlikely given how individuals and institutions are wedded to them.

Current Relevance

U.S. Joint Forces Command released the most current version of its publication on Joint Operational Planning (JP 5-0) in 2006. The new publication addressed some of the campaign design and planning disputes that occurred among the different Armed Services since the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act in 1986. One assessment written the same year that JP 5-0 was released noted its impact on CoG: "[JP 5-0] offers yet another new definition to be applied across the military…enabling effects-based operations by allowing planners to drive

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[44] Clausewitz, *On War*, 100-102. See also Eugenia C. Kiesling, "On War Without the Fog," *Military Review* (September-October 2001): 86, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/kiesling.pdf

[45] Echevarria, "*Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: Changing Our Warfighting Doctrine-Again!,*" 14.

actions that will directly or indirectly influence the [CoG]."[46] The report also expresses concern that JP 5-0's implementation of the Joint Operation Planning Process (JOPP) only confuses attempts to determine CoGs. The authors of the assessment conclude that JP 5-0 and the JOPP not only exacerbate existing problems in identifying CoG, but they create new ones as well.[47] These concerns were echoed more recently in an article in *Joint Forces Quarterly.* The article, by two Lieutenant Colonels, discusses the many issues that create ambiguity in the JOPP. First, the authors indicate that neither the Army nor the Marine Corps have revised their service doctrine to reflect or support joint doctrine.[48] Secondly, the authors add that "The American military's doctrinal guidance is insufficient in providing commanders and their staffs with a process to select [CoGs]."[49] The effects of this lack of coherent leadership, guidance, and doctrine have led those intimately involved in the process to "disassociate themselves from [it]" which risks failure in determining the CoGs through neglect.[50]

Beyond the level of doctrine, the commander's campaign strategy is rooted in Clausewitz's concept of CoG. Too many times, when courses of

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[46] Thomas P. Galvin, LtCol, U.S. Army, "Assessing The New Joint Pub 5-0 Interpretation Of "Center Of Gravity": Will It Help Or Confuse Joint Planning?" (Strategic Research Project, U.S. Army War College, 2006), Abstract.

[47] Galvin, "Assessing The New Joint Pub 5-0 Interpretation Of "Center Of Gravity": Will It Help Or Confuse Joint Planning?," Abstract.

[48] Jan L. Rueschhoff and Jonathan P. Dunne. "Centers of Gravity from the Inside Out," *Joint Force Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2011): 120. See also Joint Operation Planning (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, December 26, 2006), I–11 for U.S. DoD definition of JOPP. See also U.S. Marine Corps Planning Process (MCWP 5-1) 24 September 2001, 2-2. See also U.S. Army Field Manual (USAFM) 5-0, *Planning and Orders Production*, January 2005, 3-5.

[49] Rueschhoff and Dunne, "Centers of Gravity from the Inside Out," 121. See also Dale C. Eikmeier, Colonel, U.S. Army, "Center of Gravity Analysis," *Military Review* (July – August 2004): 156, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/eikmeier.pdf. Eikmeier supports Ruschoff and Dunne's claims when he states, "…because definitions are not clear, logical, precise, or testable, and a doctrine does not provide a practical identification method, planners lack the understanding and focus needed to meet the intent of the CoG concept… the concept is not the issue—the issue is the *definition*. I can think of no other term in military circles that generates so much debate."

[50] Ruschoff and Dunne, "Centers of Gravity from the Inside Out," 121.

action (COAs) provided to the commander recognize CoGs, the COGs themselves are too nuanced theoretically or so ethereal that little or no executable action, much less a decision, can be taken. Alternatively, COAs may identify so many tactical level "CoGs" that they obscure rather than clarify, making strategic decision or choice nearly impossible. The recent U.S. Army and Marine Corps Field Manual on COIN, FM 3-24, illustrates that it is possible to bridge the divide between strategic and tactical level in the design and planning process.[51] While not purporting to be doctrinal guidance for planning, FM 3-24 provides a means to think about how to bridge them. It calls for two distinct phases in the development of COAs: a distinct *Design* phase followed by another distinct but related *Planning* phase.[52] The gap between these two supposedly connected phases is where significant damage can occur to a campaign when less-than-effective COAs are taken against ill-defined, misunderstood CoGs, as Chapters Three and Four illustrate.

Summary

This chapter explored the origin of the concept of CoG as Carl von Clausewitz defined it in *On War*. Clausewitz's dialectic method, the incomplete nature of his theory, and his discussion of single and multiple CoGs in book six and book eight are the source of much confusion about the concept today. To resolve the confusion several theorists have attempted to clarify just what Clausewitz meant. Two such theorists, Strange and Echevarria, share both subtle and dramatic similarities and differences in their interpretation of CoG. These interpretations serve as partial explanation for the current challenges faced in the contemporary application of the concept. In the final analysis the approaches of Echevarria and Strange reflect the approach

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[51] U.S. Army and Marine Corps. *Counterinsurgency.* Field Manual (FM) 3-24. Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, December 2006. 138.
[52] FM 3-24, 138.

to war taken by Clausewitz. Echevarria puts great emphasis and faith in the genius of the commander which is representative of war in its theoretical or *ideal* form. Strange, in contrast, sees the moral and physical dimensions of CoG and translates these into their critical component elements. His approach, which is a utilitarian and functional one, reflects the requirements of war in practice or *real* war. Conceptual confusion is not just limited to CoG. As the next chapter suggests, much confusion surrounds the term "insurgency" in theory and practice.

Chapter 2

Insurgency

When I took a decision, or adopted an alternative, it was after studying every relevant factor...geography, tribal structure, religion, social customs, language, appetites, and standards.

-- *T.E. Lawrence*

Introduction

Historically, insurgent groups have frustrated attempts by far superior forces to defeat them using conventional military means. Even the most dominant military powers, such as the U.S. since the end of the Cold War, have lost blood and treasure in the in vain attempts to crush insurgents militarily. As this chapter will demonstrate, the reasons why superior powers have suffered at the hands of insurgencies reflect both the nature and character of this unique form of war. The reasons were best summarized by Sun Tzu two-thousand years ago when he wrote: "If ignorant of both your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril."[1] Insurgency is a different form of warfare, with unique problems and solutions. Failure to appreciate and account for these differences has led to great powers suffering humiliation, exhaustion, and, at times, defeat.

This chapter provides a foundation for understanding the nature and character of insurgency. It also identifies the distinctive relationship—overlaps and divergences—that exist between insurgency and CoG. To help understand that relationship this chapter first offers a definition for insurgency and places it within its broader context of irregular warfare. With context and background established, it goes on to explore the nature of insurgency through a comparison of various theoretical works by both academics and practitioners. This all-

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[1] Samuel B. Griffith, trans., *The Illustrated Art of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 125.

important nature can be determined by what is identified as its purpose and common characteristics related to the evolution of insurgencies. To illustrate these theoretical concepts, this chapter draws upon historical examples of insurgent strategies. After discussing the nature of insurgency, this chapter shifts to an analysis of the linkages between the insurgent, the population, and the host nation government against whom the insurgency is being waged. The connections between these actors and outside powers seeking to assist host nations under siege provide the fundamental linkages between insurgency and center of gravity for the United States. The last section of this chapter provides a cautionary message. It suggests that CoG analysis can be difficult because of biases, the reduction of complex phenomena to absolutes, and misperceptions that influence attempts to understand and combat insurgency.

Insurgency Defined

The purpose of a definition is to provide a statement, outline or an expression of the nature of something in question.[2] In the context of insurgency, defining the problem bounds it and allows progress in design, planning, and execution. It also allows theorists and practitioners to view the problem with an awareness of the accepted norms of insurgency, as well as the uncertainties. The challenge lies in providing a definition that encompasses the tangible and intangible aspects of insurgency, while still being tractable and operationally realistic. This is an onerous task, given the vast ocean of indefinable elements resident in the sphere of irregular warfare and CoG. The alternative, however, is foreboding. Without this definitional point of departure, conceptual and practical action can be paralyzed. Subsequently, a lack of definition on core terms can lead to significant design flaws in strategy and doctrine. Several attempts have been made

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[2] *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003), s.v. "Definition."

to exact a statement that best captures the nature and components of insurgency.

Joint U.S. military doctrine defines insurgency as "an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict."[3] Bard O'Neill captures the spirit of insurgency when he characterizes it as "a struggle between a non-ruling group and the ruling authorities in which the non-ruling group consciously uses *political resources* (e.g., organizational expertise, propaganda, and demonstrations) and *violence* to destroy, reformulate, or sustain the basis of one or more aspects of politics."[4] These definitions provide a framework departure point from which to build a more elemental comprehension of insurgency. What follows in the next section is a description and explanation of insurgency's component elements. These include insurgency's nature, purpose, and the dynamic environment in which it operates. These descriptors and components are the building blocks that add explanatory power to the definitional framework of insurgency. Part of this building block approach rests on understanding where insurgency lies in the field of warfare.

Category and Type: Insurgency and Irregular Warfare

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[3] Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 16 October 2006, 268. See also Richard H. Schultz, "Global Insurgency Strategy and the Salafi Jihad Movement." (USAF INSS Paper, USAF Academy, 2008), 5.
Shultz reinforces and elaborates on the DoD definition when he states, "Insurgency is a strategy of unconventional and asymmetric warfare executed by one of four different types of non-state armed groups that today pose complicated analytic and significant operational challenges to those states that are confronted by them." He goes on to classify them as "...the most intricate of the four types of activities carried out by armed groups."
[4] Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare* (Washington, DC: Brassey's Inc, 1990), 13. See also Shanece L. Kendall, "A Unified General Framework Of Insurgency Using A Living Systems Approach." (Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2008) 7-9. Kendall provides "1) reviews [of] existing DoD definitions of the term insurgency and discusses how this is preventing decision makers and military leaders from formulating new approaches to describe insurgencies; 2) ...revised definition of the term that reflects more accurately the nature of 21st century insurgent movements; and 3) explores alternative approaches currently being used to "rethink" insurgencies."

Subsuming insurgency in the larger structure of warfare is an important first step, in part, because it assists the reader in visualizing the commonalities and linkages with other forms of war. It illustrates how insurgency is on one hand just another variety of struggle. Categorizing insurgency also allows for a better understanding of the difference between the nature and the characteristics of war. It also shows how some of these shared elements are universal, and how others have evolved and adapted to their strategic environment. Understanding this helps facilitate and support certain courses of action from the strategic to the tactical levels of war. Realization of the complexity of insurgency hinges upon viewing it as a part of a broader class of warfare.

Insurgency falls under a larger category of warfare known as *irregular warfare* (IW). Dr. James Kiras develops an articulate image of IW and its characteristics in David Jordan's *Understanding Modern Warfare.* He explains the difficulties and risks associated with attempting to nail down a universal definition, and associated principles, of IW.[5] Nonetheless, Kiras sums up his definition of IW as:

> The use of violence by sub-state actors or groups within states for political purposes of achieving power, control and legitimacy, using unorthodox or unconventional approaches to warfare owing to a fundamental weakness in resources or capabilities.[6]

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[5] James D. Kiras, *"Irregular Warfare," in Understanding Modern Warfare,* David Jordan et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 229. See also Gerald E. Galloway, "Counterinsurgency: Relearning How to Think." (Strategic Research Project, U.S. Army War College, 2005) 2. Galloway supports Kiras' assertion that defining insurgency and IW are difficult. Galloway claims that this is partially due to "...not [being] well understood by conventional civilian and military leaders and planners because their use has been dormant for three decades." The criticality of terms and defining the type of war one is engaged in is captured in his quoting BG S Marshall as saying, "Battles are won through the ability of men to express concrete ideas in clear unmistakable language." as sourced from Keane Michael, "Our Tortured Language of War," *Los Angeles Times,* 15 January 2005.

[6] Kiras, *"Irregular Warfare,"* 232. See also U.S. Joint Forces Command, Joint War-fighting Center, Irregular Warfare Special Study, staff study, 4 August 2006, II-3. The study supports the definition provided by Kiras, and states that, "The controversy over IW terminology is nothing new. After 44 years of discussion, a definitive definition still has not emerged."

This use of violence to assume control of power is a common thread throughout IW. Among the variations of IW are coup d'état, terrorism, revolution, insurgency, and civil war.[7] These groups are not mutually exclusive, and while distinguishing between them is important, it can be extremely difficult. Simply stated, when dealing with IW, there are no black and white distinctions between these groups but rather shades of grey. Given the adaptive and dynamic nature of the different forms of IW, determining where they overlap is imperative. First, it allows for the application of the right solution to the issue at hand. Knowledge of what type of war is being waged and how its natural components are framed enables a more effective counter-strategy. Second, the ability to distinguish subtle differences and similarities among the forms of IW facilitates greater conceptual linkages within this distinct field of war. Comparative analysis of this kind enables the development of sound doctrine. It also enhances a national power's ability to adapt to a complex and diverse environment like that found in COIN.

In the case of insurgency, the most similar forms of IW are civil war, coup d'état, and revolution. Kiras' definition of IW is echoed in French officer David Galula's discussion of their interrelationship: "Revolution, plot (or coup d'état), and insurgency are the three ways to take power by force. It will be useful to our analysis to try to distinguish among them."[8]   He also points out the distinct similarities and differences between insurgency and civil war:

> An insurgency *is* a civil war. Yet, there is a difference in the
> form the war takes in each case. A civil war suddenly splits

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[7] *Kiras, "Irregular Warfare,"* 234. See also Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2-3. *Irregular Warfare,* 1 August 2007. 1,3, 81-86. Document provides further articulation of categorization of IW, as well as comparative analysis of tradition versus irregular warfare characteristics.

[8] David Galula and John A. Nagl, "*Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006). 2.

a nation into two or more groups which, after a brief period of initial confusion, find themselves in control of part of both the territory and the existing armed forces that they proceed immediately to develop. The war between these groups soon resembles an ordinary international war except that the opponents are fellow citizens, such as in the American War Between the States and the Spanish Civil War.[9]

The academic Stathis Kalyvas supports what Galula says about the murky distinctions between civil wars and insurgency. In *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Kalyvas defines civil war as, "armed combat within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of the hostilities."[10] Civil wars are usually framed in the context of what their "...overarching cleavage dimension is."[11] This idea is consistent with misunderstanding the conflict based on misperceptions of IW, where much is nuanced and difficult to define. Kalyvas goes on to note that framing conflicts like civil wars "turns out to be trickier than it seems...Are the insurgents in Iraq Ba'athist activists, Sunni separatists, Islamic Jihadists, or Iraqi nationalists?" [12] This complex linkage between civil war and insurgency, and its pertinence to Iraq, suggests its value as a case study.

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[9] Galula and Nagl. *Counterinsurgency...,* 2-3. See also Virginia P. Fortna, "Peacekeeping and The Peace kept: Data On Peacekeeping In Civil Wars 1989-2004." (Data Notes), Columbia University. Fortna provides more detail on civil war characteristics and terminology by ascribing the following criteria: " a) the war has caused more than 1,000 battle deaths, b) the war represented a challenge to the sovereignty of an internationally recognized state, c) the war occurred within the recognized boundary of that state, d) the war involved the state as one of the principal combatants, e) the rebels were able to mount an organized military opposition to the state and to inflict significant casualties on the state." p. 1

[10] Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5.

[11] Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 365.

[12] Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 366. See also James D. Fearon, "Iraq's Civil War," *Foreign Affairs*, March-April 2007, Vol. 86, no. 2. 2-15. Fearon describes the conflict as a civil war when he states, "The White House still avoids the label, but by any reasonable historical standard, the Iraqi civil war has begun... there is a civil war in progress in Iraq, one comparable in important respects to other civil wars that have occurred in postcolonial states with weak political institutions.

The overlapping elements and complex ideological, political, and social intersections within insurgency offer insights into its complex character. For example, one can attempt to categorize insurgency according to its political cause. In *Insurgency and Terrorism,* Bard O'Neill suggests that there are nine distinct categories of causes espoused by insurgents: anarchists, egalitarians, traditionalists, pluralists, apocalyptic-utopians, secessionists, reformists, preservationists, and commercialists.[13] Clarifying each category is unnecessary for the purpose of this thesis. It does demonstrate, however, that insurgency can accommodate a range of causes and purposes. It also reflects another quality of insurgency: its adaptive, evolving character.

Explanation and Description: Theory, Nature & Characteristics

The next three sections will discuss continuity and change between the nature of war and the character of insurgency. They will do so by starting with theory of insurgency, comparing with theory on the nature of war, and finally discussing the characteristics that make insurgency a unique form of warfare.

CoG and insurgency share a common foundation: the *nature* of war. Theory suggests that war is ultimately political in nature. At the end of the day, force is used to retain or acquire power to influence, effect, and exploit society, economics, and political processes. As Clausewitz stated, "The political object -- the original motive for the war -- will thus determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires."[14] This power is universal across all forms of warfare, including IW.

Although this paper will claim this nature does not change, it will also claim that its character, or the irregular methods and means used, has evolved with changes in society, economics, politics, and military

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[13] Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*. 2nd, Revised ed. (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), 20.

[14] Clausewitz, *On War*, 87.

technology. Insurgency has its own character. Given their weakness in capabilities against conventional military and security forces, irregulars throughout history have relied upon indirect methods versus pitched battles and clear fielded forces. Although weapons are important, insurgents have preferred to use time, patience, and uncertainty as their means of frustrating superior military and police force. Seemingly invisible insurgent enemies ambush at the time and place of their choosing, then retreat and melt into the terrain and the people when confronted by superior force. Decisive battles are rare in insurgency, and although military actions such as ambushes are important, what matters is the people, which the following sections will show have been given thei role as the sole CoG in the struggle. Both insurgent and counterinsurgent struggle over this CoG, and in particular, the influence and support of the people. This influence and support is the translation of the highly political nature of war in insurgency. Whoever can best influence and secure the people and their support for the longest period of time often prevails in insurgencies. The characteristics that make insurgency so difficult to the U.S. and other western powers are its complexity, dynamism, and its ability to rapidly adapt within the strategic environment.

Theory

Theory is one tool that assists in developing and organizing critical thought and questions. As discussed in chapter 1, Clausewitz addressed many challenging issues and concepts in his theory of war. Given a long history of insurgencies, it is surprising there are so few theories on this unique form of war. Mao Tse Tung was one of the few that did however create and promote a school of thought focused on what he called "The People's War." Mao's thinking on the subject of insurgency spans a large

number of works. For example, in 1937 he wrote "On Guerilla War."[15] A year later, Mao wrote his famous treatise, "On Protracted War," where he developed his three stage model of insurgency. This model would come to serve as the template for traditional insurgent warfare up through the end of the Cold War era.[16] Mao's model consists of an organized, cohesive approach to insurgency in China that was elaborate in its detail and very descriptive in its stages. These descriptions were in the form of three related and interconnected phases: political organization (strategic defensive), guerrilla warfare (stalemate), and mobile-conventional warfare (strategic offensive).[17] The components of Mao's theory link these phases to the political nature of insurgency, the characteristic distinct focus on the will of the people, its protracted character, and lastly, the critical human elements of leadership.[18] He illustrated the important linkage between the use of violence and politics, while simultaneously emphasizing the critical nature of both. More a strategy than a theory of insurgency, Mao's work nonetheless contained theoretical and practical elements that still resonate with insurgents and counterinsurgents today.

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[15] U.S. Marine Corps Fleet Marine Force Reference Publication (FMFRP) 12-18, *Mao Tse Tung: On Guerrilla Warfare,* April 5, 1989.

[16] Thomas X. Hammes, Colonel , USMC, "Countering Evolved Insurgent Networks." *Military Review* (June-July 2006): 19, ://www.army.mil/professionalWriting/volumes/ volume4/october_ 2006/10_ 06_2.html. Marvin B. Schaffer, "A Model of 21st Century Counterinsurgency Warfare.*" The Journal of Defense Modeling and Simulation: Applications, Methodology, Technology*; RAND Report, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, http://www.scs.org/pubs/jdms/vol4num3/Schaffer.pdf. Schaffer supports Hammes' statement when he writes, "The insurgency warfare being practiced by global terrorists in the 21st Century is put in a historical context and modeled mathematically. The most widely known insurgency model is the "fish in the sea" formulation attributed to Mao Tse-tung."

[17] James D. Kiras, "Irregular Warfare," in *Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies, 2ⁿᵈ ed.,* James Baylis, James Wirtz, Colin S. Gray, and Eliot Cohen, eds.(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 169. See also Schaffer, "A Model of 21st Century Counterinsurgency Warfare*,"* 2.

[18] Kiras, "Irregular Warfare," 19. See also Irvin Oliver, "Mechanized Forces in Irregular Warfare." *Military Review* (March-April 2011), 62.

Che Guevara provided another approach to insurgency, encapsulated in the concept of the *foco,* which he described in his 1960 work *Guerrilla Warfare.* The *foco* serves as both the theoretical center and practical organizational component of Che's guerrilla war.[19] From a practical standpoint, the *foco* is the "initial critical mass of the guerrillas, the vanguard of the revolution, from which all else is derived."[20] Theoretically the *foco* is the *heart,* but not the center of gravity, of the movement. Che exhorts "*the guerrilla movement* itself can generate the conditions for a revolutionary victory."[21] He asserts that the *foco* achieves momentum through action. The center of gravity in the struggle, the population, will be attracted magnetically to the *foco* through its action and as the nucleus of the revolution.[22] These short summaries of two of the most influential theories of insurgency reinforce the political nature of the struggle.

Nature

War is "not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means."[23] Politics is expressed in war through power and its control. In the book The Nature of War in the Information Age, David Lonsdale gave one of the best examinations of the unchanging nature of war. Comparing Clausewitz, Jomini, and Sun-Tzu to advocates of a current revolution in

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[19] Joshua Johnson, "From Cuba To Bolivia: Guevara's Foco Theory In Practice." *Innovations: A Journal of Politics*, Vol. 6, (2006), Department of Political Science University of Calgary, 26.

[20] Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, edited by Brian Loveman and Thomas Davies, (Oxford: SR Books, 1997), 7.

[21] Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 256.

[22] Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, xii. See also Sarah E. Zabel, LtCol, USAF, "The Military Strategy of Global Jihad." (Strategic Research Project, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2007). "Guevara used this concept, called foco-ism, in his subsequent failed revolutions in The Congo and Bolivia...foco-ism resulted from an argument as to whether the political or the military arm of revolution had primacy in the early stages of the conflict. To Guevara and Debray, the course of the revolution starts with a military unit, a "foco," that undertakes attacks against the government.

[23] Clausewitz, *On War,* 87.

military affairs, Lonsdale boiled this nature down to "a human contest in the pursuit of policy objectives,...infused by chance, uncertainty, violence, and physical exertion."[24] He said the three concepts 'trinity', 'climate of war', and 'friction' encompass the true nature of war.[25] Power and its manipulation in insurgency manifest themselves in the form of violence, bargaining, and negotiation. Government and insurgents exert power through influence, coercion, and compellence to first control the people and consolidate their hold over territory. The people can be thought of as the fulcrum through which insurgents and counterinsurgents are able to assert political control through their leverage. The active and passive support of the people is the practical way in which this concept is realized. If control is asserted justly and proportionately, popular support is translated into legitimate authority.

To sum up, insurgency shares the nature of general war; however, the relationships among politics, power and the people, as well as the struggle for them, are unique to an insurgency. The trinity is still manifest in insurgency, but the relative pull of the three poles is unmistakably distinct.

Both insurgents and counterinsurgents recognize the key role played by the population in the struggle. Lieutenant Colonel Michael Plehn, for example, suggests that it is "a well-known axiom of COIN that [CoG] of the COIN effort is the will of the people in the country where the insurgency is taking place."[26] Plehn offers that the people represent the electorate which has bargaining power in the struggle. The people, however, have a hierarchy of needs which includes the provision of

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[24] David J. Lonsdale, *The nature of war in the Information Age: Clausewitzian Future* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), 3.
[25] Lonsdale, *The nature of war...*,3 and 19-43.
[26] Michael T. Plehn, Lt Col, USAF, "The Sharpest Sword: Compellence, Clausewitz, and Counterinsurgency." (Strategic Research Project, U.S. Air Force, Air University, Air Fellows, 2005), 57.

essential services and provisions.[27] These needs can be filled by either the insurgent or the host nation government. British author and COIN expert John Mackinlay describes the challenges in fulfilling these social, economic and political obligations when he states: "It is because of the dynamic nature of insurgency, and its many dimensions that the host nation must address poverty, protect its population, and encourage economic revival, as well as the restoration of security."[28] If these needs go unattended power is expressed in less formal, political means and evolves to "express outrage, gain recognition, and be heard."[29]

One of the ways the people assert themselves is through insurgency, revolution, or other forms of resistance. Where needs remain unfulfilled the people are in varying degrees of insurgency at all times. The degree of insurgency, however, can vary considerably and take many different forms. One way to conceptualize support is a spectrum. The poles of the spectrum represent the extreme degrees of insurgency, with the far left pole representing the citizen who shuns the insurgency and provides no active or passive support. Counterinsurgency doctrine refers to such individuals as "fence-sitters" who are waiting to see who has the greatest chance of winning before they are actively involved. Conversely, at the far right of the spectrum is the insurgent, who is actively engaged in activism, infiltration, propaganda, subversion, and violence. Between these two poles are gradations of active and/or passive insurgent activity. The people are essentially the means of support, which can be influenced to provide support through various mechanisms by either counterinsurgents or

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[27] Mark Cancian, "Let's Get Serious About Stability Operations," *Proceedings* (December 2004): 32.

[28] John Mackinlay, *The Insurgent Archipelago* (London: C. Hurst, 2009), 10. See also Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 97-104. For a description of what Maslow considers his "Heirarchy of Needs".

[29] MacKinlay, *The Insurgent Archipelago*, 5.

insurgents. These mechanisms include coercion, co-option, inducement, and the use of violence.

Groups use violence according to their available resources and for the purposes they are trying to achieve. The mechanisms of violence they use can be selective or indiscriminate in application. The consequences of the choice of force application are far-reaching, as it has the capacity to create both insurgents and COIN sympathizers. These consequences depend heavily on how force, and its use, evolve and adapt to the operating environment as the case study chapters suggest. Violence is difficult to apply correctly as both sides in the struggle, counterinsurgent and insurgent, are apt to misread the operating environment. Most actors misapply force at one time or another, accidentally or deliberately, leading to potentially serious consequences.[30]

The application of force as a mechanism for influencing the population is not just subject to its quality, or discrimination. It is also heavily reliant on the element of time. Time can be thought of in insurgency as both a potential opportunity and method of success through protraction. As is illustrated throughout the case study, a window of opportunity exists for counterinsurgents and insurgents to assess the conditions of the environment, intuitively or through processes, to secure the people and their support. This window is determined, in large part, by the people's patience for either the government or the insurgents to prove their legitimacy and credibility. Once this opportunity closes, with one side obtaining an advantage, regaining access to the people to re-establish legitimacy becomes

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[30] Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 13. See Also Headquarters U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Operations Manual (FM 3-07.22) October 2004, Expires Oct 2006. p. 1-04; Cautions against overreaction; "Consequently, specific insurgent tactical actions are often planned to frequently elicit overreaction from security force individuals and units. Overreaction can result from poorly drawn ROE and even strategic and operational planning that abets brutalizing a recalcitrant population."

significantly more challenging. Protraction, the other facet of time in this case, it's a highly valued commodity for insurgents as they believe that their cause and will are superior to the enemy. Counterinsurgents, including David Galula, have acknowledged the protracted character of insurgency when he points out that, "an insurgency is a *protracted* struggle conducted methodically, step by step, in order to attain specific intermediate objectives leading finally to overthrow of the existing order. (China 1927-1949; Greece, 1945-50; Indochina, 1945-54; Malaya, 1948-60; Algeria, 1954-62)."[31] Time works as an asymmetric advantage of the insurgent. If the state can be outlasted, and shown to be unable to protect the people, some insurgents believe success is assured. The ability for an insurgent to outlast the government ties directly to the notion of opportunity. The people are willing to endure instability for so long before they retract their support and seek another actor who can provide for their needs. This protracted war is consistent with the three stages of Mao's *People's War*, and the strategy of building on one's own strengths, while exploiting the weaknesses of the state.[32]

Characteristics

The heavy weighting toward the people and the effect of protraction on war's violence make insurgency's trinity distinct. However, insurgency also has other characteristics set it apart from other forms of warfare. Insurgents are qualitatively disadvantaged against the power, and in particularly the military and security instruments of power, of the state. Therefore insurgents must rely on asymmetric means and methods to offset their weakness. Insurgency displays three characteristics that

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[31] David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria, 1956-1958* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006), 2.

[32] O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism,* 53. See also Steven Metz and Raymond A. Millen, " Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response." (Strategic Research Project, U.S. Army War College, 2004), for further reading on history of insurgency.

especially confound the identification of CoGs: their inherent complexity, the need for rapid adaptation, and dynamism.

Insurgencies are dynamic and adaptive out of necessity. Necessity in insurgency is best illustrated by T.E. Lawrence's use of the ideas contained within Julian Corbett's classic work, *Maritime Strategy*. Lawrence used Corbett's idea to develop an analogy for insurgency, and in particular, the Arab Revolt against the Turks during the First World War.[33] Lawrence first identified the unique qualities of the Arabs and concluded that they could not be trained and equipped in a conventional manner to fight against the German-trained and equipped Turks. He was able to view the desert operating environment with that of the sea. Battle in the desert, given the vulnerability of lines of communication of the more modern Turkish forces, could be thought of more in terms of action at sea given the unforgiving and unoccupied nature of the terrain. Action in the desert would be based on ubiquity of presence, mobilization of core resources, and independent operating bases.[34] Lawrence's idea was not to seek battle, but rather avoid it and force the Turks to protect their vulnerable lines of communication which were their only means of sustainment. He relied on the unique qualities of the resources at his disposal, the Arab tribes and their mobile form of fighting, along with dispersal and ambush tactics, to force the Turks to devote resources to defend themselves and chase his elusive guerrillas. The Arab would rely on localized control and superiority, versus a strategy of controlling the entire environment, as their means of frustrating and defeating the Turks. Many of the elements of Lawrence's insurgency—adaptability of

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[33] T.E. Lawrence, *The Evolution of a Revolt* (Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: Combat Studies Institute, 1990), 9. See also Gabriel Serbu, "Heavy Armour in Small Wars and Insurgencies." *Small Wars Journal*, Vol. 7 (February 2007):1-10, http://smallwarsjour nal.com/documents/swjmag/v7/serbu-swjvol7.pdf. "...analytical definitions, which describe insurgents in context with conventional armies. One of them belongs to T.E. Lawrence. He described guerrilla warfare by using six fundamental principles of insurgency..."

[34] Lawrence, *The Evolution of a Revolt,* 10.

forces, the dynamic nature of the struggle as each side sought to influence the other, and the flexibility his leaders required to lead forces independently towards a common purpose--were not exclusive to the Arab revolt.

The ability of insurgents like Lawrence to adapt and shape the conditions they fight in, choosing when and where they fight, illustrates one of their key tactical and operational advantages. Adaptation in insurgency can also occur through evolution and transformation. Steve Metz, for example, points out that the character of insurgencies will continue to evolve given that, "as insurgent strategists recognize the bankruptcy of old techniques, especially protracted, rural *people's war,* they will innovate."[35] Examples of such innovations include advanced information operations (IO) and propaganda techniques (from printing press to modern web forums), use of terrorism as a means to maximize the strategic effect of their resources, infiltration and subversion, and improvements in indirect forms of violence such as the evolution of improvised explosive devices. Mackinlay points out that evolution need not be limited to tactics or functional means. For example, he suggests that conceptually the contemporary jihad evolved from the Maoist prototype of insurgency.[36] Innovation is also a reflection of necessity based on limited resources at the insurgent's disposal. Kiras, for example, suggests that "[many] forms of political violence are unavailable to [insurgents]...they would prefer to have the nuclear or conventional resources and capabilities of their adversary in order to achieve their objectives."[37]

The innovation within and evolution of insurgency has led to stagnant doctrine and less-than-effective COIN strategies in the West. Metz argues that much of what the West has developed in way of COIN

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[35] Metz, "The Future of Insurgency," 1.
[36] Mackinlay, *The insurgent archipelago,* 10.
[37] *Kiras, "Irregular Warfare", 20.*

has been based on an outdated concept of insurgency.[38] The question remains how a seemingly simplistic form of warfare has defied the most powerful nations in the world for centuries. Part of the answer lies in the intangible and nuanced characteristics of insurgency. Much of the lack of progress intellectually within Western governments and militaries reflects their failure to know both themselves and their enemies.[39]

Context and Circumstance: Biases, Monoliths, and Absolutes

National powers and their military institutions have demonstrated an insufficient ability to self-critique, assess, and adapt to evolving insurgencies. Analyzing the common mistakes made by national powers and their COIN forces is essential in rectifying consistent errors. The complexity and dynamic characteristics of insurgency demand that caution be exercised in the analysis and assessment of findings. Too often broad assumptions are made of insurgencies and their innumerable components. These assumptions, founded in biases and aphorisms, lead to leveraging dogmatic solutions to the problems associated with COIN. This section provides examples of these preconceptions so they may be avoided in the future.

Western professionals have tended to view COIN as a "zero sum game" over the past 50 years. This oversimplification of the outcome, in which only one side wins at the expense of the other at the broad or macro level, has led to narrowly defined solutions to complex, related social, economic, and political problems inherent in insurgency. Simply put, the problem of insurgency has either been viewed alternatively through gross or fine analytic lenses. In the worst cases it has lead to labels which in turn lead to strategies and plans that poorly define the problem and are devoid of substance. Two examples include the *Global War on Terror* (GWOT) and what David Kilcullen has labeled as the *Global*

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[38] Steven Metz, "Rethinking Insurgency." (Strategic Research Project, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2007), v.

[39] Griffith, *The Illustrated Art of War,* 125.

Insurgency.[40] Such labels can lead to faulty assumptions and definitions about the enemy. Labels such as Al Qa'ida, Taliban, and Islamic Radicalism can create associations, organizations, or power and influence that may be misguided. Assigning undue power and influence to such enemies, and deriving faulty conclusions about their relationship to the population, can suit insurgent desires to provoke overreaction, extreme measures, and the indiscriminate use of violence to coerce and control.

Defining the problems too broadly presents challenges. This is also the case in trying to understand all of the complex cultural, political, and economic factors at play in insurgencies at the local or micro level. Although detail is required to know how best to act and against whom in an insurgency, the risk inherent in immersing too much in the details is loss of time, loss of perspective, and potential inaction through the paralysis caused by being overwhelmed. The seemingly infinite numbers of factors to contend with in an insurgent environment, which include local motivations and grievances, long-standing rivalries, and cultural and linguistic challenges can render the process of identifying CoGs, developing strategies, and taking action seem difficult or impossible. Determining a course of action that is manageable and will be effective, to influence the CoG, can be daunting in insurgencies.

The challenge of understanding and combating insurgency lies in being able to bound the problem. Ideally the problem of insurgency will be bound and understood, and then potential courses of action identified, prior to the start of hostilities. In other words, it is ideal and essential to prepare for COIN in advance. Insurgency is a dynamic challenge given that insurgents start with the initiatve and strive to maintain it throughout using the methods and means described above. This forces counterinsurgents to respond. The first steps against

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[40] David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of A Big One* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 12.

insurgent groups cannot, however, be reactive in nature. Merely responding to insurgent violence, without considering the broader context, allows insurgents to maintain the initiative. While counterinsurgents respond, insurgents are consolidating their hold over the population and mobilizing their resources. The actions of the counterinsurgent must be deliberate, selective, adaptive, and controlled. A knee-jerk response or half-hearted measures that ignore or deny the nature and character of the insurgency may close the window of opportunity to regain the initiative and win over the population forever. As the case study chapters will show, successive U.S. commanders in Iraq almost succumbed to failure by misunderstanding both the nature and character of the insurgency and it's CoG.

Chapter 3

The Iraqi Insurgency: CPA

Introduction: Case Study - Evolution of the Iraqi Insurgency

This thesis is about perceptions and realities of CoG and insurgency. The case study presented here challenges preconceptions about each through a comparative analysis of the evolving insurgency in Iraq. Preconceived notions proved pervasive in the coalition planning environment and for those attempting to understand and combat the rising insurgency in Iraq in 2003. While much has been learned in the last eight years about the insurgency and how better to counter it, misperceptions linger. The goal of this case study is to determine CoG's value and effectiveness as a tool in helping strategists understand and combat insurgencies. The case study addresses this issue by answering three questions about CoG in Iraq: what did U.S. and coalition planners think the center of gravity of the insurgency was in 2003; what it really was; and what factors created this gap between perception and reality.

Background

A summary of the events leading up to the insurgency in Iraq is important for several reasons, to include better understanding of why the U.S. still maintains forces there. Context is critical in understanding the overall conflict that has persisted in Iraq. Another important aspect of such a background is to explain the various perspectives and assumptions that were pervasive before the war and during the conventional phase of OIF. Policies and the interrelationship between civil and military authorities also play a critical role, as do the linkages between doctrine, strategy, and their related processes.

At the conclusion of OPERATION DESERT STORM, Iraq managed to maintain its sovereignty, albeit at a great cost to Saddam Hussein, his regime, and the people of Iraq. The Hussein regime was able to continue

its reign of terror and live to fight another day.[1] Although still in the seat of power, Saddam Hussein and his regime had narrowly avoided being deposed in the period shortly after OPERATION DESERT STORM. Uprisings by Kurdish forces in Northern Iraq, and Shi'ite factions in the south, were violently crushed by Hussein, leading to the United Nations to establish no-fly zones in northern and southern Iraq.[2]

The greatest concern of the international community and successive U.S. presidents after OPERATION DESERT STORM was not the stability of the regime, but rather Hussein's continued desire to expand his Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) programs.   Much of this concern was grounded in the reality that Hussein had used one form of WMD, chemical weapons, during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988): first against Iranian military forces and later against part of his own population, in particular Northern Iraqi Kurds in the town of Halabja (March 1988).[3] After OPERATION DESERT STORM, and for the remainder of the subsequent decade, Saddam Hussein played cat and mouse games with U.N. weapons inspectors investigating Iraq's supposed WMD program. While no specific evidence of WMD emerged during inspections, U.S. and international suspicions remained.[4] These suspicions were boosted, along with concerns that Iraq would provide such weapons to terrorists, after the U.S. was attacked on 11 September 2001 by members of Al-Qaeda.

After the attacks on 11 September, U.S. national strategy took on a dramatically different posture. This posture, labeled by the Bush

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[1] Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 5.

[2] Bruce Pirnie and Edward Connell, *Counterinsurgency in Iraq (2003-2006): RAND Counterinsurgency Study* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2008), 4.

[3] For specific details of attacks, see Anthony Cordesman and Abraham Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War, Volume II: The Iran-Iraq War* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1990), 506-518.

[4] Steven Metz, *Iraq & the Evolution of American Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008), 41.

Administration as a "crusade against evil", responded to fears of trans-national terrorists seeking, obtaining, and using WMD against the United States. Given Iraq's history of production and use of WMD, its interest in acquiring nuclear weapons, and support of trans-national terrorists in the past, these fears seemed well-grounded.[5] To preempt Saddam Hussein from providing such support to Al Qaeda, the Bush Administration in late-December directed the combatant commander in charge of the Middle-East, General Tommy Franks (U.S. Central Command, or CENTCOM), to begin planning for operations against Iraq.[6] After more than a year of various diplomatic wrangling between the White House, the United Nations (U.N.), and Saddam Hussein over suspected WMD, human rights violations, and terrorist connections, President George W. Bush offered his final ultimatum to the Iraqi dictator on 17 March, 2003.[7] Two days later, U.S. airstrikes began, marking the beginning of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM and paving the way for coalition land forces to enter Iraq the very next day. By 1 May, 2003, the President of the United States (POTUS) felt confident enough to declare mission success and call an end to major combat operations in Iraq.[8]

It is unnecessary to discuss at length the events of OIF for the purpose of this paper; instead we will identify several factors that contributed to what became a protracted insurgency in Iraq. First, and most importantly, a coherent national policy did not exist with regard to U.S. objectives in Iraq once Saddam was ousted.[9] There were significant disconnects between POTUS, the Office of the Secretary of State, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense that resulted in a lack of clearly defined

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[5] Sarah Shapiro, "Misperceptions & Imperfect Intelligence: Threat Perception in the 2003 Iraq War." Queens University, CDAI Conference. October 2008.

[6] Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 53.

[7] Pirnie and O'Connell, *Counterinsurgency in Iraq*, 7.

[8] Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 412.

[9] Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iraq's insurgency and the road to civil conflict* (Westport u.a.: Praeger Security International, 2007), 6.

national objectives from which to plan a strategy for continued military operations. In addition, senior military officials and their staffs appear not to have been acting in concordance with one another.[10] Added to this confusion was the fact that the U.S. military and political leaders did not seem to foresee or grasp the nature and operational environment of the conflict in which they were about to engage.

Conventional operations during OIF can be characterized as swift, where coalition forces were able to secure the majority of Iraq's cities and provinces in a limited number of pitched battles and with few casualties.[11] The President's 1 May announcement signaled an end to what military planners know as *Phase Three Operations* (called the *Dominate Phase* in the Joint Publication for Operational Planning) and opened the door to *Phase Four Operations* (the SASO phase).[12] According to U.S. Army doctrine, SASO activities occur after decisive combat operations and are designed to stabilize and reconstruct the area of operations (AO).[13] There is disagreement in the literature as to how well SASO was implemented during this period immediately after the coalition's premature declaration of victory. Questions of how well prepared the U.S. was for these stability operations are paramount among these disputes.[14] Many argue strategists and planners for both CENTCOM and the U.S. Army's Combined Force Land Component Commander's (CFLCC) staff failed to develop an executable plan. Other's claim civil authorities within the DoD, specifically the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), were responsible

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[10] James Howard, "Preparing for War, Stumbling to Peace: Planning for Post-Conflict Operations in Iraq." (Master's Thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2004), 15.

[11] Metz, *Iraq and the Evolution of American Strategy*, 143.

[12] JP 5.0, 4-34.

[13] Headquarters U.S. Army, Stability Operations, Field Manual (FM) 3-07, 2-2.

[14] Catherine Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom: Strategies, Approaches, Results, and Issues for Congress*, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2008), 13.

for the phase and the military only played a supporting role. Still others assert there was a plan, it was executable, but senior civil and military leaders failed to provide the resources or troop strength necessary to support it.[15] These perspectives continue to be debated but are not the focus of this chapter. Instead it focuses on what occurred in Iraq between 1 May 2003 and the present.

Stage 1: CPA

The first stage of post-conflict Iraq is characterized by the control asserted by the authoritative group responsible for the country's reconstruction and rebuilding. Initially, responsibility for this reconstruction effort fell on ORHA, which was established organizationally under the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD).[16] ORHA had been led by retired Lieutenant General Jay Garner, who had been placed in command of the organization by Secretary Rumsfeld in early 2003. By May of 2003, just weeks after the successful end of major-combat operations, the POTUS directed ORHA be replaced by the CPA, with Ambassador L. Paul Bremer as its director. The CPA was to serve as the sovereign authority in the country of Iraq while SASO occurred in support of democratization.[17]

From May 2003 to April 2004, SASO conducted under CPA's charge were fundamentally flawed. During this period, CPA was the civil authority in Iraq, while Combined Joint Task Force – 7 (CJTF-7) served as the military authority, with (then) Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez as the senior U.S. commander on the ground in Iraq.[18] Sanchez

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[15] Donald P. Wright and Timothy R. Reese, *The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom, May 2003-January 2005: On Point II: Transition to The New Campaign* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 27.
[16] Elaine L. Halchin, *CPA – Origin, Characteristics, and Institutional Authorities* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2008), 1.
[17] Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom...*, 15.
[18] Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom...*, 27.

had replaced Lieutenant General McKiernan, who was the Combined Force Land Component Commander under General Franks.

The period from early May to mid-July was marked by significant changes in the civil and military authority and supporting staff, organization, and command structure of CPA.[19] These changes, which resulted in modifications to U.S. and coalition strategy and resources and ultimately Iraqi expectations, further de-stabilized the country during this phase. This de-stabilization is best expressed and understood through an analysis of the strategic environment, the enemy, and the CoG during CPA's period of influence.

Strategic Environment

A common and accurate understanding of the strategic environment is critical to all levels of war, from national policy and grand strategy to the execution of operational level plans. This understanding is more critical in the complex environment of failed or failing states.[20] Army doctrine for SASO points out that understanding the strategic environment is critical to establishing and maintaining stability and security in such states.[21] More importantly, it cites the challenges associated with being successful in these types of operations. Understanding of the strategic environment serves as the stage upon which the principle actors perform. It provides the context to understand the impact of the myriad complex elements present in a state like Iraq. It also illustrates the socio-political and economic impacts on Iraq society, and how ethnic, tribal, and criminal elements served as a backdrop for the events in mid-2003. The U.S. perception of the environment was based on expectations and assumptions, both heavily influenced by complexity and dynamism. Pre-invasion assumptions

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[19] Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom...*, 29.

[20] Stefan J. Banach and Alex Ryan, *The Art of Design: A Design Methodology* (Ft. Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center, 2009), 126.

[21] *Stability operations*. Washington, DC: HQ, Dept. of the Army, 2008, 1-2.

about what would be required for success in Iraq varied widely in the White House, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and with senior leaders at CENTCOM.[22] This was due to uncertainty and disagreement surrounding the effectiveness of Iraq's military, post-invasion response by Ba'athist officials, and the Iraqi population. Similar disagreements arose over the threat in post-conflict Iraq. Some Iraq subject matter experts claimed while there would be an increase in looting and common crime, they "did not predict the rise of any organized insurgency or armed resistance."[23] Alternative descriptions of Iraq after combat ceased predicted mass uprisings, terrorist attacks from within the population, and violent flashpoints based on what they called a "complex and fractured Iraqi society."[24]

The first component in this environment was determining the U.S. role in SASO in Iraq. The military's perception of SASO in 2003 was heavily influenced by a tradition rooted in combat arms, where war-fighting took center stage. SASO was less of a priority to a military that "[had] a disproportionate focus on combat operations, while losing sight of the desired strategic objective and post conflict considerations."[25] The plan eventually adopted to defeat Iraqi forces demonstrates a perception of SASO out of touch with post-conflict realities. Further complicating this distorted picture was pressure to fight according to the perceived "new" realities of what senior civilian and military leaders called a "revolution in military affairs." A focus on fewer, faster troops, precision strike; persistent surveillance; and relentless tempo of operations gives the perception that civil and military leaders viewed this

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[22] Steve Bowman, *Iraq: U.S. Military Operations*, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2003), 2.

[23] Wright and Reese, *On Point II*, 88.

[24] Conrad C. Crane and Andrew W. Terrill, "Reconstructing Iraq: Insights, Challenges and Missions for Military Forces in a Post-Conflict Scenario." (Strategic Research Project, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2003), 37.

[25] Robert Cassidy, "Prophets or Praetorians? The Utopian Paradox and the Powell Corollary." *Parameters* XXXIII, no. 3 (2003), 130.

as a war unlike any other. Not only would the war be novel in its conduct but also in its outcome. The dazzling pace of operations would lead to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and swift establishment of a secure democracy.[26] The marginalization of SASO in military planning, combined with unrealistic assumptions about the outcome and inadequate understanding of the physical and human terrain, shaped perceptions about Iraq which influenced efforts to identify the center of gravity of the insurgency.

Organization and command structures provide the clearest illustration of the gap between the perception and reality of the priority given to SASO relative to conventional war-fighting. The CPA utilized a bottom-up approach in its efforts. Local military commanders had to figure out how and what to do based on local conditions with little direction from CPA. Although CPA issued directives there was no policy, strategic, or operational guidance for it to accomplish its mission.[27] The perception among U.S. forces is that the SASO mission, and its support of a strategically enduring peace, was less a priority than military victory. At the tactical level, for example, planning and preparation were insufficient to accomplish the SASO mission. The majority of military units operating in Iraq had little to no SASO training, equipment, or experience. Even those units which had such experience and training were poorly prepared to conduct SASO specifically in Iraq and they were overwhelmed by the apparent complexity of social and economic conflicts taking place.[28] From a strategic perspective, SASO was grossly ineffective due to a lack of unity of effort and guidance from CPA and above, as well as ignorance of the operating environment.

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[26] Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom...*, 11.

[27] Cordesman, *Iraq's insurgency...*, 12.

[28] Michael Rounds, Colonel, U.S. Army, "Initial Impressions Report: Operations in Mosul, Iraq; Stryker Brigade Combat Team 1/3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry." 21 December 2004), 28.

One well-known example of the misunderstanding of the operating environment is reflected by how leaders at all levels perceived the population, their core motivations, and underlying grievances. The expectation from the POTUS down to the squad level was that Iraqis would greet U.S. forces with open arms as liberators from the tyranny and oppression of Saddam. In reality, Iraqi perceptions and expectations were contingent on a number of factors.[29] The most important perception within the Iraqi population, ironically, was based on the performance of U.S. and coalition forces as they made short work of Saddam Hussein's security and armed forces. The pace and intensity of this campaign, which some labeled *"Shock and Awe,"* in turn led Iraqis to expect an equally dramatic increase in individual and local security and stability. Iraqi civil infrastructure was an example of the paradox of expectation created in the minds of the Iraqi population on the basis of the speed of the military campaign. The infrastructure that the Iraqis believed the U.S. would rebuild with its all-powerful military and economy was the same infrastructure that senior U.S. political and military leaders believed would be relatively intact.[30] For the Iraqis such infrastructure represented their very *fabric of society*, and included more than just the buildings, plants, and power grids. It encompassed the intellectual power, skill-sets, and tradecraft of engineers, security officers, teachers, garbage workers, and water treatment plant supervisors. This infrastructure enabled Iraqi society to function. Yet CENTCOM and CJTF-7 planners largely saw the physical infrastructure

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[29] Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The War in Iraq: An Interim Assessment* (Ft. Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center, 2005), 10.

[30] Heather S. Gregg, Hy S. Rothstein and John Arquilla, *The Three Circles of War: Understanding the Dynamics of Conflict in Iraq* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2010), 37.

and the social elements as two separate elements in the rebuilding of Iraq.[31]

Nowhere is the contrast in U.S. perceptions and reality of the operating environment starker than in the first orders issued by CPA. On 16 and 23 May, respectively, Ambassador Bremer instituted CPA Orders One and Two that for all intents and purposes dissolved the Baath Party, the Army, and Iraq's security forces.[32] The perception within CPA was that these actions would be met with gratitude by the Iraqis when in reality it disenfranchised hundreds of thousands of Iraqi professionals.[33] CPA leaders failed to understand the role the Baath Party played in Iraqi society. Most Iraqis who were members of the Party had little to no loyalty to Hussein or its goals but belonged out of professional necessity to enhance their chances for promotion and access to opportunities. In addition, sidelining those citizens with the necessary skills to run the cities put economic and social stability in jeopardy. Lastly, without the army and police, the security within the country would cease to exist. Instead of co-opting former Iraqi army and security personnel for use in SASO efforts, CPA marginalized them, leading to hostility against the "liberators," and set the conditions for a civil war between Sunni and Shi'a in the society.

Faulty perceptions of the social, economic, and political realities in Iraq led to poor strategic decisions by senior U.S. civil and military leaders in May 2003. A window of opportunity existed for the U.S. to establish security, and subsequently stabilize the country to allow for the development of a legitimate Iraq government. Not understanding there was a significant threat to this security, the U.S. failed to structure its

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[31] Katharina Phillips, Shane Lauth, Erin Schenck and Andrew W. Terrill, "U.S. Military Operations in Iraq: Planning, Combat, and Occupation." (Strategic Research Project, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2006), 11.

[32] Metz, *Iraq and the Evolution of American Strategy*, 154.

[33] L. Paul Bremer III, interview by Michael Kirk, "The Lost Year in Iraq." June 26 and August 18, 2006. PBS Frontline, transcript available at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/yeariniraq/interviews/bremer.html.

command or strategy to counter it. Part of this misunderstanding lay in preconceived notions and assumptions about what a post-war Iraq would look and act like. The assumption was the U.S. would be welcomed with open arms, and SASO would be the provision of stability to a war-torn nation. Likewise, CPA was under the assumption their programs of de-Ba'athification and dismantling the Iraqi security apparatus would promote a thriving and stable democracy. Neither of these assumptions held true, and this gap led to an even greater unintended consequence involving the people of Iraq. In reality, the time for the U.S. to demonstrate it could secure Iraq from a rising internal threat was passing. The people were waiting to see who would fill the power void, and ultimately establish credible political legitimacy and a monopoly over the use of violence in Iraq. Had the U.S. a much clearer understanding of the growing threat, leaders may well have managed to develop a strategy to counter it. The environment, like the enemy, was shifting like a stage changing for the next act.

The Enemy

There was a distinct difference with CPA and CJTF-7 between who the enemy was and how he was perceived. The assessment of the type of resistance liberation forces would encounter varied greatly prior to OIF. Senior civil and military leaders chose to plan based on the assumptions that resistance would be weak, disorganized, and would pose an insignificant threat to rebuilding efforts.[34] This perception of a peaceful post-war Iraq proved to be far from reality.

In the summer of 2003, organizations in Washington D.C. held wide-ranging characterizations of the enemy in Iraq. In June of 2003, several analysts within the Department of Defense warned that the U.S. was experiencing an insurgency in Iraq, although their reports were

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[34] James Howard, "Preparing for War, Stumbling to Peace: Planning for Post-Conflict Operations in Iraq." (Master's Thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2004), 40.

marginalized by senior civil and military officials.[35]   Instead these officials labeled those conducting the violence as hangers-on or small pockets of resistance. These officials also insisted that all the U.S. had to do was mop up a few violent extremists and Iraq would be on the path to democracy. For example, Secretary Rumsfeld claimed the violence stemmed from "the remnants of the Ba'ath regime and Fedayeen Death Squads…that were being dealt with by coalition forces."[36] These gaps in perception and reality extended to the AO as well.

Planners and officials in CPA and CJTF-7 insisted the violence was due to, "last gasp dead–enders rather than a serious insurgency."[37] A similar sentiment was expressed by Major General Raymond Odierno, the commander of the U.S. Army's 4th Infantry Division, when he described the enemy as "non-compliant forces and common criminals; this is not guerrilla warfare, it is not close to guerrilla warfare because it's not organized, and it's not led."[38] These opinions and CPA actions subsequently enflamed the already explosive insurgency. In June of 2003, the CPA announced the creation of the New Iraq Army (NIA) and shortly thereafter the establishment of the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC). These decisions, while thought to be a positive move for the Iraqis, had the unintended effect of driving a further wedge between Sunnis, Shi'a, Kurds, and U.S. forces. In an attempt to down-play the armed resistance in Iraq as an uncoordinated, rag-tag assortment of criminal groups, the assumptions held by top U.S. officials and commanders served to only embolden the insurgency.

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[35] Metz, *Iraq and the Evolution of American Strategy*, 147.

[36] Donald Rumsfeld, prepared testimony presented to the Senate Armed Services Committee, July 9, 2003.

[37] Metz, *Iraq and the Evolution of American Strategy*, 158. See also Anthony H. Cordesman, *The New Bush Strategy in Iraq: Is Victory Still Possible? A Detailed Analysis of the Bush Plan*, Report, (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007), 2.

[38] Metz*, Iraq and the Evolution of American Strategy*, 148.

In October 2003, CPA and CJTF-7 announced a four-phased plan designed to turn over security responsibilities to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). This decision, combined with organizational and force structure changes, led many to believe that the strategy in Iraq was sufficient. Rumsfeld felt the insurgency was still a, "temporary aberration, not a strategic paradigm or something that should be allowed to derail his long-term vision for the American military."[39] Although at this time General Sanchez and Ambassador Bremer requested more troops to stem the tide of insurgency and establish security, the request was denied by Generals Abizaid and Myers and Secretary Rumsfeld.

Hindsight offers a unique opportunity to assess the reality of the growing discontent in Iraq during this period. The overall CPA and CJTF-7 assessment about the size of the insurgency being relatively small at this point was accurate but nevertheless it overlooked critical features about its internal organization and coordination. The various Iraqi insurgent groups were evolving and adapting. These groups were adapting in the sense that overcame sharp ethnic, ideological, and religious differences and affiliations to unite in a joint endeavor for a common purpose: to attack and expel U.S. forces in Iraq.[40] The violence in Iraq stemmed from two primary sources: remnants of Saddam's Ba'athist regime and foreign extremists.[41] The reality of the emerging violence was predicated upon separatists and sectarianism and manifested in a number of groups. While the FREs were a part of the core of the insurgency that served as an organizing element, they represented only a small percentage of those fighting.[42]

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[39] Metz, *Iraq and the Evolution of American Strategy,* 159.
[40] Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom...*, 38.
[41] Pirnie and O'Connell, *Counterinsurgency in Iraq*, 10.
[42] Steven Metz, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq," *The Washington Quarterly: The Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology* Vol. 27, no. 1 (Winter 2003-04): 25-36; 28. See also Bowman, *Iraq: U.S. Military Operations*, Summary.

The groups that made up what was often monolithically called in the press "the insurgency" included Sunni Arab opposition groups, Shi'ite Arab militias, violent extremists, and criminal elements. With these diverse groups came an assortment of loyalties, causes, and methods. The insurgents' objectives and violence focused on insurgency along sectarian and ethnic lines. The Sunni Arab cause was associated with and driven by their opposition to an Iraqi government "dominated by Shi'ite Arabs and Kurds – supported by U.S. forces."[43] Shi'ite Arab militias had a long history of resistance in the Sunni–led Iraq. Prior to the occupation by U.S. forces, the Shi'ite militias were the primary means to defend the Shi'a population against oppression, violence, and crime.[44] Their strong influence and powerful, persuasive leadership would prove to be a key component in the Shi'ite resistance to what was perceived as a nefarious U.S. occupation of their sovereign land. Other groups within the insurgency were foreign extremists and common criminal elements. The motivations of the foreign elements were widely varied and they "gravitated to the crises for various reasons ranging from personal to Salafist (fundamentalist) causes."[45] The motivations of and threat posed by criminal elements was a different story. While in U.S. perceptions they posed little to no long-term threat to the stability and democratization of Iraq, the reality was quite different. Selling their services to the highest bidder, these criminals ultimately served the needs of both the enemies of the U.S. and budding Iraqi government.[46] Average Iraqis considered criminality and, in turn, the lack of security to be the greatest threat to their lives.

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[43] Lionel Beehner, "Backgrounder: Shiite Militias and Iraq's Security Forces." *Council on Foreign Relations* November, no. 1 (2005), 1.
[44] Michael Comstock, Captain, U.S. Army, "The Battle for Saydia: An Ongoing Case Study in Militia Based Insurgency." *Small Wars Journal* 1, no. 2 (2008), 1.
[45] Metz, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq," 22.
[46] Pirnie and O'Connell, *Counterinsurgency in Iraq,* 22.

As the size and intensity of the insurgency grew in Iraq, so did the realization that some form of organized resistance existed. After nearly two months of armed resistance against U.S. forces the new CENTCOM Commander, General John Abizaid, announced during an interview that the U.S. was facing "a classical guerrilla type campaign...war, however you want to describe it."[47] The problem now confronting the U.S. and its allies was that in just two months the character of the multifaceted insurgency had evolved and solidified. While civil and military authorities had accepted there was an enemy, the delay in arriving at this realization created a condition where U.S. forces would constantly fall behind in its understanding of an adaptive, evolving, complex mix of armed groups and insurgents.

The diverse nature of these groups, along with their ability to adapt within their environment, underscores the many reasons why COIN efforts have been lagging in their effects. The signs that would have indicated what lay in store for post-conflict Iraq were there to read. The country had struggled for years with sectarian violence, an indicator of what to expect in a society void of any security apparatus. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) pointed out in February 2003 that, "invasion would bring about a new wave of terrorist attacks in Iraq...[and] increased targeting of troops after the war."[48] With prophetic warning like these and others, it is perplexing as to how the gap between the perception and reality of what would occur in Iraq after Saddam was toppled was so wide.

The reasons for the gap between perception and reality can be attributed, at least partially, to much of what has already been written about insurgencies discussed in Chapter 2. The insurgent "enemy" can be defined loosely as elements and individuals choosing to fight the U.S.

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[47] BBC News, "U.S. Faces Iraq Guerrilla War," British Broadcasting Company, 16 July 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3072899.stm

[48] Howard, "Preparing for War, Stumbling to Peace..." 25.

forces and the Iraqi government. These diverse groups exhibited throughout the CPA period the traits of insurgency identified in Chapter 2: complexity, adaptability, and dynamism. For example, complexity was evident in the multifarious causes, overlapping loyalties, and irregular methods used by Iraqi groups and individuals to thwart U.S. forces. Their decentralized command and control and loose organization also contributed to the complex character of the initial insurgency. These groups illustrated the characteristic of dynamism as well, changing their tactics and means of violence. Their ability to harness the recruitment tool, as well as the need to reach out for external support showed a focus on persistent growth, synonymous with dynamism. Lastly, each group showed an uncanny ability to adapt to a conventionally superior force in an austere, changing environment. The willingness to put aside conflicting ideologies, political affiliations, and tribal vendettas speaks to their level of adaptation.

The groups comprising the insurgency exhibited a degree of cooperation in order to strengthen the collective resistance against the U.S. Their strategies and tactics evolved through this coordination. By July 2004, the insurgency became increasingly centralized and sophisticated in its information flow, organizational structure, specialization, and methods.[49] Insurgent groups increasingly sought to enhance their own prestige, credibility, legitimacy, and area of control.[50] Eventually the most visible, vocal, capable, and largest groups acknowledged their common purpose by issuing joint declarations against the U.S.

By early 2004, many Iraqis had lost patience with U.S. claims to rebuild Iraq that were unmatched by meaningful progress. For example,

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[49] Krepinevich, *The War in Iraq: An Interim Assessment,* 7.

[50] Such groups included the 1920s Brigade, *Jaysh Ansar al-Islam, Al-Jabha al-Islamiya lil-Muqawama al-'Iraqiya,* and the nascent Al Qaeda-affiliated group, *Tandhim al-Qa'ida fi Bilad al-Rafidayn.* International Crisis Group, *Middle East Report No. 50 - In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency*, February 15, 2006 (Washington, D.C.), 8.

the provision of basic services such sewage and trash was irregular and the supply of electricity to cities such as Baghdad woefully inadequate. Frustration over these issues led to street demonstrations and increasing attacks against U.S. and coalition forces. In January 2004, Grand Ayatollah Sistani led thousands of Shi'ites in marches demanding direct elections.[51] By April of that year, violence had spread throughout Baghdad, to the north in Kirkuk and beyond, as well as south to communities increasingly aligned with the powerful Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr. This violence peaked on 4 April when U.S. Marines launched OPERATION VIGILANT RESOLVE in Fallujah in response to an outburst of violent extremism, including the massacre of four U.S. contractors and the public desecration of their bodies.[52]

Just five days after the start of OPERATION VIGILANT RESOLVE the U.S. declared a ceasefire in Fallujah on 9 April. This conduct of operations in Fallujah and their end had a number of significant effects both small and large. For example, two IGC representatives resigned due to the conduct of the operation and in particular, its heavy-handed use of firepower and maneuver in a built-up city.[53] The ceasefire, for its part, served to embolden the insurgency in Iraq. In CPA and CJTF-7 circles the gesture was meant as an olive branch, or a symbol of willingness to comprise and consider Iraqi government and popular concerns. Those within insurgent groups perceived it instead as a sign of weakness, an opportunity to further refine their methods and grow, evolve, and adapt— in other words, that they could hold firm and make U.S. forces quit.[54] Much of what the various groups and elements with the insurgency were

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[51] Metz, *Iraq and the Evolution of American Strategy*, 165

[52] Bing West, *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2005), 4.

[53] Ricks, *Fiasco*, 343.

[54] William Knarr, Robert Castro and Dianne Fuller, "The Battle for Fallujah: Al Fajr -- the Myth-buster." (Strategic Research Project ADA530831, Institute For Defense Analyses, Joint Advanced Warfighting Program, Alexandria VA, 2009), 18.

able to accomplish was contingent upon popular support, either passive or active.

The Center of Gravity

The U.S. failure in seeing the violence as indication of a developing insurgency led it to neglect developing a long-term COIN strategy. Part of this strategy would have been the critical step of CoG analysis. The operational CoGs for the decisive military operations phase in OIF were characterized by General Tommy Franks as, "...slices of the Iraqi regime's capability or vulnerability. Nine in all, they ranged from leadership, to command and control (C2) nodes, to WMD infrastructure and Republican Guard Divisions."[55] Given the success of the military operations and maneuver phase of the campaign, there was little criticism raised regarding the design and planning efforts in this phase. The next phase of the operation, stability and security operations, has however come under great scrutiny.

For the first few months of stability and security operations after Saddam was overthrown, planners either did not identify a CoG or failed to communicate it. Only in July 2003 did Lieutenant General Sanchez identify an insurgent or stabilization CoG when he delivered his campaign plan.[56] General Sanchez identified the operational level CoG of phase four operations in Iraq as *the people.* At first glance it appears that the General was correct, and even prescient in his assessment. It is common knowledge that the people are central to any focus on irregular warfare. The implication of this focus is that without the active and passive support of the people, conducting COIN operations are difficult at best and probably will last far longer than they need, if they succeed at all. The problem with General Sanchez's CoG assessment is not in its accuracy but rather the level of analysis chosen. Identifying the people is one thing, but without further defining what this term means can and

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[55] Woodward, *Plan of Attack,* 56.
[56] Wright and Reese, *On Point II*, 119.

did lead to gross errors of oversimplification. For example, the expression *"the people,"* much like the overused expression *"winning hearts and minds,"* can become a block characterization of a highly diverse, dynamic grouping. Failing to distinguish differences within "the people," and assign relative weights and values, led CJTF-7 and its forces to focus on the popular support of the people. Focusing on popular support was necessary, but the translation throughout the command and especially to the forces dealing with the Iraqi population created problems for CJTF-7 and CPA.

The problem of focusing on popular support was two-fold. First, by not recognizing the need to identify a CoG, subsequent plans by CJTF-7 staff were not developed and required operations not executed. Second, once a CoG was identified, it failed to account for the dynamic and complex characteristics inherent in the CoG, in this case, the people. Based on actions occurring in theater during this time, Sanchez and his staff viewed action against this CoG in terms of the people's basic services and needs – food, water, electricity, etc.[57] The delay in establishing a COIN strategy, which would have prioritized resources and linked security and stability of the population with services, did not occur until the insurgency was already well underway. This delay resulted in a campaign in which CJTF-7 always appeared to be one step behind both the needs of the population and the evolving insurgency. This situation would continue to boil over as U.S. troops became more and more frustrated with the lack of results, causing friction between the troops and Iraqi citizens. Frustrations on all sides continued to mount and pointed to the fact that a critical element of the CoG analysis had not been identified earlier.

Security of the people serves as the backbone to any successful COIN (COIN) strategy. Conversely, by not providing security, the CPA

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[57] Metz, *Iraq and the Evolution of American Strategy,* 150.

put significant consequences in motion, as was demonstrated in Iraq between 2003 and 2004. Failing to provide security in the chaotic environment immediately following the fall of the Hussein led to multiple effects. First, it created a power vacuum that was rapidly filled by multiple armed groups. These armed groups were able to seize the opportunity and establish a foothold within the fabric of Iraqi society, enabling them to pursue their support.[58] Secondly, by not establishing security, the U.S. lost the battle for credibility and legitimacy. Iraqis had seen the U.S. seize the city and topple Saddam and his regime. Subsequently they watched as violence fell over their cities, all the while U.S. forces seeming to either not be able to counter the violence and crime, or not wanting to.

The security situation in Iraq at the time was complex and based, in part, on different needs and conditions which varied widely between cities and regions.[59] It grew more expansive and became even more dynamic the longer no action was taken to provide security. There was an additional consequence as well. By not clearly articulating security of the people as the CoG, or at the very least the critical vulnerability, actions at the tactical level would prove to destabilize the situation further. In essence, the means to provide security at that time was in the form of a heavy hand. "Operationally and tactically the U.S. COIN approach [could] be characterized as one of coercion and enforcement rather than a hearts and minds policy."[60] The effects of this approach have shown to be catastrophic, and directly linked to the idea of the people being central to successful COIN strategy. Use of a heavy handed approach created more insurgents and insurgent sympathizers.

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[58] Daniel Byman, "An Autopsy of the Iraq Debacle: Policy Failure or Bridge Too Far?," *Security Studies* Vol. 17, no. 4 (October 1, 2008), 608.
[59] Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom...*, 35.
[60] Hashim, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq,* 322.

Determining just one causal factor for the misanalysis and misperception of CoG in this stage is not easy. One potential reason reflected U.S. military preferences for conventional war-fighting, neglecting the need to resource, train, and equip for security and stability operations, as well as misguided assumptions about how U.S. forces would be greeted by the Iraqi population. CoG analysis in this case failed because planners were unable to see the proverbial forest through the trees. Failing to depart from theoretical and intellectual biases led U.S. planners to overlook a significant factor early in their analysis, and by the time they did consider it, after conventional military operations ended, the nature of the problem had changed.   The Iraqi people expected the U.S. to make good on its promises of reconstruction, democracy and an improved way of life. Other reasons include resource deficiencies with regard to numbers and skill levels of planners and intelligence analysts in theater at this time.[61] Still, fault may also lie in the failure of senior leadership to heed Clausewitz's advice to, before all else, understand the type of war you are engaging in.[62]

The wide expanse between the reality and perception of what CoG was can succinctly be explained through the characteristics of complexity, dynamism, and adaptation.   The characteristic of complexity manifested itself in CoG with the concept of the people. They can take on complex and overlapping roles based on loyalty, cause, and the state of their environment. U.S. planners focused on the support of the people, without knowing who they were, what support they needed, the linkages between the two, and the consequences of providing uninformed support. This is one direct effect of not understanding the often complex and adaptive characteristics of CoG. This misperception created more insurgents, more insurgent supporters (both active and passive). The U.S. and coalition faced a growing sense of frustration, leading to their

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[61] Hashim, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq*, 321.
[62] Clausewitz, *On War*, 88-89.

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response of treating all Iraqis in the same manner– with suspicion and distrust.

Complexity also has to do with the derivation and application of CoG. The traditional approach to planning in the U.S. military utilizes linear charts, models, and processes that would lead one to believe that finding a CoG is a simple twelve-step process. In reality, this design and planning process is difficult to articulate, communicate, and effect. The intellectual bias played a role as well. Strategists were pre-ordained to assert a traditionally accepted interpretation of Clausewitz's metaphoric tool, viewing CoG in a more mechanistic, traditional military manner. All these factors conspired to create confusion for not only planners but to those who were executing the plan. As security bled away, many Iraqis became more and more disenchanted by the coalition. By the end of CPA's time as the authority in Iraq, most Iraqis viewed U.S. forces as occupiers who not only didn't care about their security, but served as the force that had created the instability and chaos.

Summary

The misanalysis of the people and our support of the people segues to the second stage of the insurgency. As will be evident in the next chapter, a knee-jerk reaction to the growing insurgency led to an even more explosive situation in Iraq. As General Sanchez and CPA departed, and General Casey arrived to address the growing insurgency, the lesson taken from stage one was that support of the people did not work. General Casey came to command with the perception that the solution to the problem was to first provide security and this entailed an approach heavily centered on the insurgent enemy. For all intents and purposes, he saw the CoG of the insurgency as the insurgency itself.

Chapter 4

The Iraqi Insurgency: Divided Command

Introduction

By the summer of 2004, the strategy implemented by General Sanchez and Ambassador Bremer had proven fatally flawed. A lack of unity of effort between CJTF-7 and CPA was the root cause of this flaw. In addition, the inabilities to conceptualize, coordinate, and synchronize efforts between two parallel hierarchical chains of command led to an expedited derailment of U.S. efforts in Iraq.[1] The continuous disconnects and shortcomings of both organizations, as well as their respective strategies, led to a denial by President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld, through to Lt General Sanchez and Ambassador Bremer, of what was happening in Iraq. This allowed the security situation to worsen and an insurgency to grow unchecked in both complexity and strength. More Iraqis gradually lost faith in the U.S. and its promise to liberate them and their country. It soon became evident to both civil and military leaders in the U.S. that a change was needed. These adjustments would prove to be a trial by fire; a continuous effort on the part of the U.S. to regain its momentum and establish a security and stability foothold in Iraq.

Strategic Environment

From mid-2003 to the summer of 2004, a series of complex transformations took place in Iraq that would influence the context of the strategic environment. These events would ultimately affect the existence of Iraq as a sovereign nation-state. Two changes occurred related to the restoration of Iraqi sovereignty and its government's ability to provide greater security and stability. First, General Abizaid sought

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[1] Donald P. Wright and Timothy R. Reese, *The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom, May 2003-January 2005: On Point II: Transition to The New Campaign* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 181.

approval for a four-star, multi-level command in Iraq to deal with the mounting security, economic, and political issues. This reorganization was based on the challenges facing Lieutenant General Sanchez, who held the responsibility for theater strategic, operational, and tactical level guidance. The unique challenges faced by the commander in Iraq required a larger staff, as well as a higher ranking commander to facilitate theater objectives.[2] In the spring of 2004, the new plan was approved creating Multi-National Force Iraq (MNF-I), along with subordinate commands, including Multi-National Corps - Iraq (MNC-I), and Multi-National Security Transition Command – Iraq (MNSTC-I).[3] The second change had to do with the civil authority in Iraq. On April 19, 2004, President Bush appointed John Negroponte as the first Ambassador to the new Iraq.[4] Shortly thereafter, on June 30, 2004, the CPA transferred political sovereignty to the Iraq Interim Government (IIG).[5]

Several other notable events transpired highlighting the dynamic nature and importance of this juncture. In December 2003 U.S. forces captured Saddam Hussein, who had evaded U.S. and coalition forces for several months. Officials felt the tide of resistance would turn, and Iraqi faith in the U.S. would be restored.[6] Many thought it would be a cathartic experience for the coalition and the Iraqi public.[7] They also assumed the will of what was perceived to be isolated pockets of

[2] Wright and Reese, *On Point II,* 181.

[3] Wright and Reese, *On Point II,* 181.

[4] MSNBCNews.com, "Bush's statement on Negroponte U.S. envoy to Iraq nominated as National Intelligence Director," *MSNBC News*, February 17, 2005,http://www.msnb c.msn.com/id/6987036/

[5] U.S. General Accounting Office to U.S. House of Representatives, memorandum for record, Subject: Iraq's Transitional Law (GAO-04-746R), May 25, 2004.

[6] Patrick E. Tyler, "The Capture Of Hussein: Global Reaction; Leaders Set Aside Differences To Congratulate U.S. New York Times," *CNN.com*, 15 December 2003.

[7] CNN, "CNN Transcript: Press Conference Announcing Hussein's Capture," *CNN News*, December 14, 2003, http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0312/14/bn.0 1.html

resistance would be broken.[8] Instead, a year-long uphill COIN conflict ensued.

The violence initially had its roots in a Sunni-based resistance but gradually grew to include discontented segments of the Shi'ite population as well. In January 2004, the Grand Ayatollah Sistani, the single most powerful political figure in Iraq, led approximately thirty-thousand followers through the streets of Basrah to protest for direct elections.[9] The White House and Office of the Secretary of Defense struggled with what course correction to apply. 2004 was an election year, and re-election partially hinged on a well-articulated national strategy in Iraq.[10] U.S. domestic attitudes were increasingly negative towards the continued war in Iraq.[11] International support also waned, including that of the populations within countries providing forces to the coalition.[12]

As the CPA era closed, allies like Hungary, Thailand, and most importantly Spain withdrew their forces from Iraq.[13] Domestic and international pressure was on the Bush administration to expedite the political and military strategy in Iraq. To stop the proverbial bleeding of support, the President put in motion a set of decisions that would defeat the enemy, secure the people of Iraq, stabilize the country, and establish

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[8] Paul Rogers, "Iraq, Al-Qaida and the US Presidential Election" (International Security Monthly Briefing/Lecture, Oxford Research Group, February 2004).

[9] Stephen S. Lanier and Rosharon Bobak, *Low Intensity Conflict and Nation-Building in Iraq: A Chronology, Report,* (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005), 8.

[10] David Karol and Miguel, Edward, "The Electoral Cost of War: Iraq Casualties and the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 69, no. 3 (August 2007), 645.

[11] John Esterbrook, "Poll: Iraq Taking Toll On Bush President's Popularity Drops To New Low; Kerry Moves Ahead," *CBS News,* May 24, 2004, http://www.cbsnews.com /stories/2004/05/24/opinion/polls/main619122.shtml

[12] Frank Newport, "International Opinion on War in Iraq, American Public Opinion on Iraq, Bush Approval, Mood of America, America's Role in the World, Bush's Focus on the Economy, Will War in Iraq Rally the Economy?," *Gallup Poll*, February 18, 2003, http://www.gallup.com/poll/7834/international-opinion-war-iraq-american-public-opinion-iraq.aspx

[13] Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 347.

a thriving democratic Iraqi government that would support U.S. interests in the region. From this policy guidance, leaders at CENTCOM and MNF-I would derive the theater campaign plan for Iraq. The person chosen to develop and execute the campaign was General George Casey. On July 1, 2004, the General took command of MNF-I from Lt General Sanchez, and shortly thereafter set in motion a strategy change in accordance with the new policy direction. As important as this new strategy was, it would face internal and external challenges of its own.

Unexpected factors posed a threat to U.S. success during this tenuous time. Several reports indicated a degree of discontent within the lower military ranks. Morale throughout the force was fading as was faith in senior service leaders. In the U.S., recruitment statistics were declining, making force sustainment difficult in theater. In addition, units in Iraq were being tasked with duties for which they had no training, equipment, or experience.[14] Commanders and troops alike found themselves playing the civilian roles of resource managers for directorates of public works.[15] This decrease in morale was reinforced by the persistent disconnect between headquarters and divisions in the field that had existed for over a year. There was an inability to link tactical victories at the division level with long-term strategic success at the corps and force level. Other external challenges would prove no less difficult.

Soldiers were facing an insurgent enemy that seemed much more able to adapt and evolve to the challenges in Iraq. What had begun as disconnected armed groups, organized at the core by FRE's and Ba'athist loyalists, soon became a diverse mix of actors with overlapping loyalties

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[14] Center for Army Lessons Learned, "Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) CAAT II Initial Impressions Report (IIR)," May 2004, p. iii.; See also Karl Vick, "Group Faults U.S. Tactics Against Civilians in Iraq," *Washington Post.* October 21, 2003, http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article5033.htm

[15] Michael Rounds, Colonel, U.S. Army, "Initial Impressions Report: Operations in Mosul, Iraq; Stryker Brigade Combat Team 1/3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry." 21 December 2004), 28.

and dynamic causes. The various Sunni insurgent groups were able to build on the resentment felt by disenfranchised Ba'athists and former Iraqi Army and security forces personnel. They were able to harness the anger of those who had lost their honor at the hands of the U.S., and the helplessness of those who were unable to feed their families.[16] The Shiite militias and groups boiled over after dealing with failed U.S. promises and being faced with an occupation that denied them the liberty they sought. Oddly enough, similar criticisms resounded from the Iraqi people, who had watched over the last year as the situation for most had gone from bad to worse.

By the summer of 2004, the large majority of the population in Iraq—Sunni, Shiite, and Kurd—was disenchanted with what appeared to be a U.S. occupation. Promises of security and stabilization after liberation had long since been cast aside as empty pledges. The window of opportunity to gain popular support of the people, while still open, was just barely so. Much of the population needed a degree of security from the range of armed actors increasingly asserting their power and authority to fill the existing vacuum. Such actors ranged from common criminals to trans-national terrorists. The infrastructure within Iraq, from electrical power plants and transmission lines to oil wells and refineries, remained largely in shambles as no over-arching U.S. theater strategy existed to tie division level projects to larger, more complex ventures. Even more critical was the lack of government development within the country. The U.S. felt the urgency to re-establish the sovereignty of Iraq, through the establishment of a constitution and a form of representative government to provide a voice for the people in Iraq. What many individuals within Iraq wanted, however, was free elections. In just a year, Iraq had grown multiple, parallel growing crisis

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[16] Kanan Makiya, "All Levels of the Iraqi Government Were Complicit," *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring Vol. (2005), 84.

situations in need of triage. Failure to establish security up front resulted in cascading effects such as a declining Iraqi acceptance of U.S. occupiers, a growing uphill battle of U.S. legitimacy, greater difficulty in reconstructing Iraqi infrastructure, and prolonging the creation of a stable Iraqi government.[17] Having only treated the symptoms of these problems in the beginning of phase four operations, the U.S. was now faced with mounting issues, all of which were equally important and intricately interlinked.

The Enemy

For all of its efforts in Iraq, the Bush administration clung to the hope that victory could still be secured. The administration's expectations swelled as Iraq regained its sovereignty on 28 June, with the first free elections to be held in only 6 short months. Equally promising was the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC) being transferred to the Iraqi Ministry of Defense (IMD), indicating the initiative of the Iraqis to take on a larger part of the security role. Lastly, General Casey and MNF-I brought renewed hope that the U.S. would indeed be able to exit soon and claim its national and military objectives complete. The cautious optimism would be short-lived, as the enemy surged and adapted to the changing environment.

When General Casey took command, MNF-I's perception of the enemy was one mainly of multiple Sunni-Arab groups led by FREs.[18] This perception neglected the warnings of insurgency experts who assessed the enemy as an insurgency on a grand scale. What General Casey did not see was an insurgency that had become more complex and diversified and had evolved in many ways. The diverse groups had refined their strategies, organizations, and methods. A report done by

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[17] Timothy S. McWilliams and Kurtis P. Wheeler (ed.), *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume I. American Perspectives, U.S. Marines and Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004-2009.* S.l: s.n., 2010.

[18] Wright and Reese, *On Point II,* 105.

the U.S. Government Accounting Office (GAO) found that insurgents were consistently able to recruit and re-supply, while increasing attacks against U.S. and Iraqi forces 23 percent.[19] Being able to exploit the people locally, and gain both their passive and active support, was central to what was becoming an increasingly complex insurgency. U.S. and coalition insurgency experts also judged that some of the more powerful groups had developed linkages with outside actors in Iran and Syria.[20] The organization and recruiting efforts by some insurgent groups, such as Tandhim al-Qa'ida demonstrated sophistication previously unseen, creating specialized, linked divisions responsible for detection of opportunities, surveillance, and execution of specific missions.[21] This increased sophistication of attacks and organization impeded efforts of the IGC and MNF-I to establish stability.[22]

The armed groups in Iraq managed to progress and adapt in other ways as well. This progress went unchecked by U.S. senior leaders, as insurgents continuously redefined themselves through the merging of their diverse, underlying causes, their constantly changing loyalties, methods, and organizations.[23] The violence soon emanated from more than just Sunni extremists and included a range of other actors as well.

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[19] David M. Walker, testimony on, "Rebuilding Iraq: Governance, Security, Reconstruction, and Financing Challenges," before the subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform, House Of Representatives, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Accountability Office, April 6,2006.

[20] Geoffrey Kemp, "Special Report 156: Iran and Iraq The Shia Connection, Soft Power, and the Nuclear Factor," United States Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C. (November 2005), p. 8

[21] Thomas E. Ricks, "Insurgents Display New Sophistication," *Washington Post,* April 14, 2004, p. A1. See also Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iraq's Evolving Insurgency and the Risk of Civil War,* Report, (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005), 17.

[22] Steven Metz and Raymond Miller, "Insurgency in Iraq And Afghanistan: Change And Continuity." (Strategic Research Project, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2004), 7. Steven Metz and Raymond Miller, "Insurgency in Iraq And Afghanistan: Change And Continuity." (Strategic Research Project, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2004).

[23] Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iraq's insurgency and the road to civil conflict* (Westport u.a.: Praeger Security International, 2007), 146.

The ethnic divisions within Iraq since its establishment in 19XX laid the ground work for these groups. Sunni and Shia Iraq were largely divided along ethnic lines, with some neighborhoods sharing both. However, after the fall of the Hussein regime and subsequent de-Ba'athification, these areas lacked functioning, responsive and in some cases available mechanisms of governance. Both Sunni and Shi'a factions filled the power vacuum by "forming new or expanding [the] existing militias."[24] These militias served not only as local governance but also filled the void of security that the U.S. could not. The radical Shi'a cleric Muqtada al Sadr led one of the most powerful and potentially destabilizing of these Shi'a militias, one that was increasingly taking part in violent insurgent actions.[25] Al Sadr's army, Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM), continuously increased the frequency and lethality of its attacks in 2004 and 2005.[26] More importantly though, these attacks spread from what had mostly been Sunni-dominated areas, in the so-called "Sunni triangle" near Baghdad for example, across the entire country.[27] While U.S. DoD reports led the world to believe the conflict was in its death throes, the diverse groups which comprised the insurgency were growing increasingly stronger, more adaptive, and bolder in their attacks against U.S. and coalition forces.[28] The insurgents' ability to adapt and resist the U.S. forces would serve to strengthen the legitimacy of these groups over time. As General Casey arrived in Iraq in 2005, the various groups were well established in their positions as power brokers.

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[24] Daniel Byman, "An Autopsy of the Iraq Debacle: Policy Failure or Bridge Too Far?," *Security Studies* Vol. 17, no. 4 (October 1, 2008), 607.

[25] Joseph A. Christoff, *Rebuilding Iraq: Status Of DOD's Reconstruction Program,* GAO Report, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2006), 9.

[26] Catherine Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom: Strategies, Approaches, Results, and Issues for Congress*, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2008), 36.

[27] Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom...*, 9.

[28] Andrew F. Krepinevich, "How to Win in Iraq." *Foreign Affairs,* (September-October, 2005), 1.

Senior military and political decision makers in Washington and Baghdad continued to minimize the threat such armed groups posed and ignored the civil unrest that existed in Iraq.[29] The sophistication of the insurgency became increasingly evident even to outsiders.[30] Around this time staff analysts detected more cooperation between diverse elements of Sunni and Shi'a groups in Iraq, as well as an increase in foreign jihadists. Strategy and operational level coordination among armed groups was identified, to include sharing lessons learned, promoting cohesion and advanced tactics, and sharing methods for "best practices" of extremist violence.[31] The coordinated attacks were a foreboding sign for U.S. and coalition forces. The insurgent "enemy" strength at this time was estimated to be approximately 20,000, with recruitment on the rise and foreign fighters numbering in the hundreds.[32] The various groups shared target sets and increasingly directed their attacks against MNF-I. As ISF forces took on more of a security role, the groups targeted them as well, as did the people who supported the groups including their families. What allowed the groups to work together, and to a degree unite, was their shared common goal. This goal, the removal of U.S. forces from Iraq, allowed many groups to overcome animosities and deep-seated ethnic rivalries.

After the elections of 2005, and the subsequent drafting of an Iraqi constitution, the characteristics of the insurgency again changed. Areas of sectarian violence grew in scope and scale as political disunity between the groups became apparent. This led to rifts in the alliance between insurgent groups.[33] In mid-2005 a study showed that of Iraq's

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[29] Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict,* 146.
[30] See for example the assessment of the analysts of the International Crisis Group, "In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency."
[31] In Their Own Words. P. 15
[32] Andrew F. Krepinevich, "How to Win in Iraq." *Foreign Affairs,* (September-October, 2005), 2.
[33] International Crisis Group, *Middle East Report No. 50 - In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency*, February 15, 2006 (Washington, D.C.), 17.

eighteen provinces, only three could be characterized as an environment that was *semi-permissive.* All others were known to have either "routine or extremely high levels of insurgent activity, assassinations, and extremism."[34] It became a persistent challenge for MNF-I and MNSTC-I analysts to identify who the actors were and against whom they were fighting, much less why. Sunni Arab insurgency continued to provoke sectarian violence, which was now fueled and supported by foreign Al Qaida factions.[35] Ethnic and tribal disputes, combined with foreign jihadists implementing terror tactics, created a network of chaos throughout Iraq.

The insurgency resembled a loose constellation of actors, at times pulling together and others flying apart, but in sum they expanded exponentially. Their methods and tactics became more sophisticated. One example was the emergent use of improvised and increasingly technically sophisticated explosive devices (IEDs), which were used more frequently and caused increasing numbers of coalition casualties.[36]

Indirect attacks by such insurgent groups demonstrated their awareness of important external factors, such as recruitment and the importance of avoiding high attrition rates. The operational effect of the use of IEDs and other indirect attack methods of attacks was to inflict greater casualties on U.S. and coalition forces while preserving insurgent force strength. Insurgent groups took a very pragmatic approach to recruiting. It was becoming harder to get members to join insurgent groups if recruits were concerned about getting caught or dying in direct attacks against militarily superior U.S. and coalition

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[34] David M. Walker, testimony on, "Rebuilding Iraq: Governance, Security, Reconstruction, and Financing Challenges," before the subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform, House Of Representatives, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Accountability Office, April 6,2006.

[35] Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 150.

[36] Interview with James D. Kiras, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama (15 May 2011), based on his support to the Combined Explosives Exploitation Cell, 2004.

forces. Other pragmatic efforts to minimize risk to their own insurgents included paying unemployed Iraqis a month's worth of ISF wages to emplace an IED.

Although attacks against U.S. forces proved popular in mobilizing recruits and obtaining funding from outside donors, the direction of insurgent violence shifted repeatedly in the face of changing military and political realities on the ground. For example a number of insurgent groups increasingly targeted ISF forces in 2006, as the U.S. pushed for Iraq to take more security and governing responsibility. The insurgent groups showed tremendous flexibility and strategic calculation with their ability to target effectively.

The insurgent "enemy" had grown from isolated pockets of Ba'athists and Saddam'ists to a coordinated, well-supplied and organized loose network of insurgent groups. While some groups had distinct causes and ethnic grievances, they all shared a common goal during this period of ridding Iraq of U.S. and coalition forces.

Toward the end of this period, fissures were created in this coordinated insurgency. U.S. and coalition forces were more difficult to attack, thanks to improvements in coalition technology, tactics, techniques, and procedures. In addition, an increase in legitimate governance in the form of the IGC and free elections provided another political option for some. Most importantly, the actions of one single insurgent group redefined the character of the insurgency. Within the Sunni groups, conflicting sectarian beliefs and religious practices led to significant rifts between Iraqi Arabs and Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).[37] AQI was led by Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, who had for much of 2005 united a network of other Iraqi Sunni groups to inflict violence on first on U.S. and ISF forces, and then redefined the conflict as a civil war in highly provocative attacks against Shi'a holy places. However, by late 2005,

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[37] Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom...*, 35.

Zarqawi's tactics along with those of AQI created a denunciation of their extreme tactics by other Sunnis.[38] The specifics of the relationship between Zarqawi, AQI, Iraqi Sunni Arabs and Shi'ites is beyond the scope of this work. What can be said is by the end of 2005, Zarqawi and AQI had managed to alienate themselves from Iraqi Sunnis. The real error in judgment for Zarqawi and AQI came on February 22, 2006 when AQI extremists bombed the sacred Shi'a Al-Askari mosque in Samarra.[39] This, combined with AQI heavy handed tactics, mistreatment of Sunnis, and their increasing insistence on their extremist ideals on Iraqis led to a Sunni uprising against AQI. This uprising would come to be known as the *Awakening*, and would create a unique opportunity for U.S. forces to build alliances with both Shi'a and Sunni elements that would unite to defeat AQI.

Strategy, operational level coordination, and evolving tactics all represented a thinking enemy that collectively had learned to adapt to MNF-I's strategy. The strategic changes made by MNF-I, and the operations associated with them, are discussed below. The insurgency's reaction to General Casey's new plan of *Clear, Hold, and Build*, however, fell short of expectations of MNF-I planners. What now seems to be clear is that the network of interrelated groups of different ethnic background and diverse allegiances, collectively recognized the critical role of the people of Iraq in the insurgency. Not only was the role of the people identified, it was effectively implemented as a tool, both passively and actively, against the ISF and U.S. forces.

The Center of Gravity

Upon his arrival as commander, General Casey directed a significant change in the theater campaign. It was arguably the first

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[38] Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 32.

[39] Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for A Way Out of Iraq* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2008), 156.

campaign plan that approached the issue of a long-term military strategy in Iraq since the end of phase three operations. The plan was announced on 5 August, 2004, underlined by the major points of *Presence and Posture*.[40] General Casey's plan served as his roadmap for defeating insurgents in Iraq, in which he called for "full spectrum COIN operations."[41] This approach to COIN emphasized a more holistic approach, recognizing and integrating the relevant factors to include the civilian, military, and intelligence when viewing the problem, as well as devising a strategy.[42]

The strategy was complex in its scope and the number of component elements and it relied heavily on decentralization for implementation and success. MNF-I would be responsible for the coordination and synchronization of the various political, military, and economic aspects of the COIN strategy. The success of the campaign hinged upon being able to link effects directed from MNF-I, through both MNC-I and MNSTC-I, down to the division level. The plan called for:

> "…containing the insurgent violence, building up ISF, rebuilding economically, and reaching out to the Sunni community through both coercion and cooption, in an effort to persuade them of the inevitability of success for the U.S. led side."[43]

One of the characteristics of this campaign was its traditional top-down approach to overall guidance. General Casey had a clear idea of how he wanted to organize his command and subsequently how he would delegate the multitude of responsibilities within his AO. Much of

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[40] Ricks, *Fiasco.* 392. See also George W. Bush, *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, November 2005), Executive summary.

[41] Wright and Reese, *On Point II,* 42.

[42] Matt Calvin, "People, Partnerships And Collaboration Understanding And Improving Intelligence In Counterinsurgency." *Josef Korbel Journal of Advanced International Studies*, Vol. 1, (Summer 2009), 61.

[43] Ricks, *Fiasco,* 392. See also William Hix, Colonel, U.S. Army, interview by Michael Kirk, "The Lost Year in Iraq." February 7, 2007. PBS Frontline, transcript available at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline /endgame/interviews/hix.html (accessed May 2, 2011).

this authority was handed down to MNC-I and MNSTC-I. One observer characterized the division of labor between the commands in the following way: "MNC-I planned and conducted operations at the tactical level of war. MNSTC-I coordinated programs to train and equip the ISF."[44]

While still very decentralized, MNF-I guidance directed MNC-I to focus its efforts in an enemy-centric approach: the goal was containing and isolating the enemy from the people. The mission for MNF-I and General Casey, as dictated by the policy direction from President Bush, was to enable the Iraqi government to take over its responsibilities as the sovereign authority in the country. As such, the strategy was to rid the country of those who wished to derail the political process. This new focus on clearing the enemy would have direct linkages on how MNC-I determined the operational CoG. What would soon become evident to planners at MNF-I, and commanders at MNC-I was that a traditional, kinetic approach had significant shortcomings when dealing with an insurgent force.

General Casey continued to refine his campaign plan as his forces engaged the enemy in their attempt to isolate them from the population, thereby providing the people with much needed security. General Casey harnessed the ideas of the COIN SMEs on his staff and applied their recommendations to his plan.[45] He also demonstrated a more refined approach to COIN by establishing a specific school on the subject. The COIN academy was established at the U.S. base in Taji, just north of

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[44] Wright and Reese, *On Point II,* 42.

[45] Ricks, *The Gamble*, 12. See also See also Kalev Sepp, interview by Michael Kirk, "The Lost Year in Iraq." January 17, 2007. PBS Frontline, transcript available at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/endgame/interviews/sepp.html (accessed May 2, 2011). See also William Hix, Colonel, U.S. Army, interview by Michael Kirk, "The Lost Year in Iraq." February 7, 2007. PBS Frontline, transcript available at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline /endgame/interviews/hix.html (accessed May 2, 2011).

Baghdad.[46] The week-long short-course for his commanders on COIN was an effort by the general and his advisors to link his strategy with operational and tactical level actions. General Casey's hope was to change the perceptions and approaches of his tactical commanders on how to engage both the people and the enemy. Staff perceptions at the time were that the recipe for success had possibly been perfected and Casey's plan would prove effective.[47] Unfortunately multiple factors conspired to prevent U.S. forces from claiming a long-term strategic victory in Iraq under General Casey's tenure.

General Casey's identification of the security of the people as the CoG was correct. However, there were two characteristics of his strategy and associated CoGs that were flawed. First, the CoG assessment came a year too late into the campaign. Secondly, the tactical attempts and related methods by U.S. and coalition force at providing that security to the Iraqi people did more harm than good.

The CoG General Casey established suffered from inaccurate assessments, poor assumptions, and flawed techniques. First, General Casey believed it a mistake to increase U.S. forces, and that it would lead to increased Iraqi perceptions the U.S. forces were occupiers.[48] This belief showed a continued failure to recognize that security was a prerequisite for any other aspect of stability, or reconstruction for the people of Iraq. Second, as identified by one of General Casey's chief planners, General Casey was unable to visualize, communicate, or apply

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[46] Daniel Roper and Richard Kiper, "The Rediscovery of Doctrine: The US Army and Counterinsurgency." *Security Challenges,* The Rediscovery of Doctrine: The US Army and Counterinsurgency. Vol. 6, no.1 (Autumn 2010), 33.

[47] See also Andrew Krepinevich, Lt Col, U.S. Army, (ret), interview by Michael Kirk, "The Lost Year in Iraq." January 10, 2007. PBS Frontline, transcript available at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/endgame/interviews/krepinevich.html (accessed May 2, 2011).

[48] BobWoodward, "Outmaneuvered and Outranked, Military Chiefs Became Outsiders," *The Washington Post*, 8 September 2008, A1, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/07/ AR2008090702426.html

"[the] linkage between CoG and end-states."[49] General Casey's short-sighted view of CoG is captured in his reply to these end-states, when he remarks, "That's the problem with you pointy-headed, ivory tower academic types. You know nothing about war."[50] General Casey's statement would imply that he felt the CoG was straight-forward, and obvious, versus one that required significant flexibility, forethought, and adaptability on the part of his strategists. From 2004 to 2005 the violence in Iraq grew, as attacks on U.S., coalition, and ISF increased. At the same time, ISF forces were demonstrating their inability and unwillingness to stop the violence. While political improvements were taking place in Iraq, MNF-I did not couple their effects with the necessary security of the people or the rebuilding of civil infrastructure.

There were several reasons Casey's strategy was failing. One principle cause was General Casey's inability to operationalize his strategic CoG, the people. There is no quick fix or short-cut in this process where the commander must conceptualize a complex problem and develop a strategy. The reason General Casey was unable to do this was that his strategy was not only misunderstood, but it was not in line with what was operationally or tactically feasible. Isolating the people from the insurgency was a task that could not be done quickly. Collectively such efforts would take years to succeed, not the months identified by planners. When it became more and more obvious that isolating the people from the insurgents was going to take considerably more time than they thought, General Casey and senior leaders reassessed and attempted to alter their approach to the problem. The alteration of MNF-I's approach was the second reason for the failure of the strategy. The insurgent "enemy," in reality a loose confederation of

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[49] Tomislav Z. Ruby, "Effects-based Operations: More Important Than Ever," *Parameters* (Autumn 2008), 31, http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/parameters /08autumn/ruby.pdf.

[50] Ruby, "Effects-based Operations…", 35.

groups bound only together in a rough common purpose, had already proven much more adaptable and fluid in their preparation to U.S. plans and actions. The lull in attacks and insurgent activity that had occurred in late 2003 and early 2004 was not a sign of the downward spiral in the insurgency, as many had perceived it. In reality this period was one of retrenchment, organization, and complex planning and preparation by multiple insurgent groups. This preparation and growing sophistication is what plagued U.S. and ISF forces throughout 2004 and 2005. The intensity of insurgency activity is also what would lead to a heavy handed approach to the enemy, increasingly cemented in the mind of MNF-I leaders and planners as the CoG.

What soon developed in the U.S. command structure was a combination of frustration, confusion, and hasty decisions in an effort to quickly dismantle an intricate system of violent groups. The organization, synchronization, and coordination between MNF-I and its subordinate commands did not exist. MNF-I's guidance was not being communicated or executed at the corps and division levels. Alternately, tactical operations and results were not being relayed to command. Efforts throughout the chain of command were being conducted in a vacuum. What came to pass were multiple, battlefield engagements, directed at the division and corps levels, without the proper oversight of MNF-I. The ability to link tactical level success on the battlefield to a long term strategic success would prove unattainable. One assessment of the events was that they appeared not so much a campaign strategy, but more of a bumper sticker.[51] Francis "Bing" West, a defense expert assessing General Casey and his staff at the time, asserted that "by and large, battalions continued to do what they knew best: conduct sweeps and mounted patrols during the day and targeted raids at night."[52] While the strategic CoG could still be seen as the people, an inability to

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[51] Ricks, *The Gamble,* 12.
[52] Ricks, *The Gamble,* 12.

link the conceptual nature of that CoG to a practical application would serve as the root of the problem.

Other issues added to the complexity and chaos of the challenge in Iraq during this time. The crux of the campaign strategy was isolating the enemy from the people in order to provide security to facilitate Iraqi government rule and stability. The *Clear, Build, and Hold* strategy was the foundation for operations in mid-2005. U.S. forces would clear, ISF would hold, and the Iraqi government in conjunction with U.S. assistance would build government institutions and infrastructure. In parallel to this, General Casey was challenged with minimizing U.S. casualties, while gradually giving more of the responsibility for this role to the ISF and NIA. When the reality of the situation struck and the Iraqis proved unreliable, it became evident that the U.S. would shoulder the role.

General Casey's answer to the challenge was to establish Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) throughout Iraq. FOBs served as launching points for raids and sweeps. They also had the unintended effect of isolating U.S. forces from the people they were supposed to protect. Casey's strategy had been to isolate the insurgents from the people; ironically it was the U.S. forces who had isolated themselves. The FOBs created a physical barrier that symbolized the existence of an occupation force in Iraq, further leading insurgent groups to band together. The bases also denied the U.S. critical human intelligence as analysts were unable to develop the critical one-on-one relationships necessary for actionable intelligence. Thirdly, the isolation accomplished nothing but short-term, tactical gains. U.S. and coalition forces conducted sweeps to clear out insurgents, only for the latter to return once MNF-I forces returned to their bases. Lastly, and most importantly, the FOBs represented the fundamental failure in understanding the CoG. The FOB walls were more than physical barriers, they were cultural and strategic barriers. By reverting to an enemy-centric approach to the CoG (the

people) General Casey undermined U.S. legitimacy and credibility.   The strategy failed because U.S. forces were not out amongst the people. While this entailed much greater risk, it was a necessary risk and one that was not communicated to senior civil leaders in the development of policy. The legitimacy and credibility that were the foundation for the COIN effort were being undercut by the strategy that was devised to create it.

The strategy developed by General Casey failed in the end because he did not develop his conceptual idea of what the CoG was into actionable operations and tactics. In addition, the strategy was hampered by flawed assumptions of the strategic environment and the actors at play in that environment. The insurgency had become a complex and sophisticated collection of diverse factions, even beyond what the most experienced analysts had anticipated. The environment had taken on such convolution politically and culturally that sorting the people from the enemy for the purpose of CoG analysis was near impossible. That said, the degree to which the U.S. had lost the people's active and passive support at that time made it extremely difficult to be successful. The CoG had been the people--more specifically their security. During this stage of the insurgency, the U.S. was losing because it could not provide that security, or as General Casey said, were not able to isolate the people from the enemy. This failure would prove a long-term, strategic breakdown in the overall COIN effort. The U.S. had demonstrated that it could not protect the people, and that it was unable to establish a monopoly over the use of force and violence in Iraq. That loss of credibility and legitimacy would serve the insurgency in Iraq by giving them the power to use force. This power added passive and active support from the population and ultimately created more insurgents. All of these conditions would eventually have to be overcome.

Summary

The two and half years that encompass the *Divided Command* are best characterized as a period of "shocking deterioration."[53] Changes were made in leadership and organization with the assumption they would stem the tide of violence in Iraq. Analysts believed that critical events like Saddam Hussein's capture marked the beginning of the end for the insurgency. General Casey and Ambassador Negroponte were sent to combine their efforts in the support of Iraq to stand on its own feet, and most importantly, allow the U.S. to get out of Iraq successfully. Unrealistic policy guidance, merged with a poor strategic assessment of the enemy, and created a strategy that would fail to accomplish its objectives. While armed with good intentions and promising an effective strategy, General Casey was not able to operationalize his CoG.

General Casey and his subordinate commanders demonstrated how a powerful force, cognizant of what constitutes an effective COIN strategy, can fail to execute it. As the enemy evolved faster and with more complexity and sophistication, General Casey's planners and forces failed to adapt with the same rapidity and elasticity. Because of this, commanders at the corps and division level were able to declare tactical victory, but only in the face of a larger strategic failure. General Casey had taken the necessary steps to evolve from what Lt General Sanchez had begun in 2003. He had implemented a long term strategy, made fundamental changes, and recognized that what he faced was indeed a multi-faceted enemy. Where he failed was in his articulation and operationalization of the COIN CoG for this stage of the insurgency. He failed to link the importance of the people, how they were intimately linked to the enemy, and how U.S. actions significantly affected the population's passive and active support. General Casey's top down approach failed to link the tactical victories with a longer, strategic level victory. The decentralizing of his forces through the incorporation of

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[53] Ricks, *Fiasco*, 444.

MNC-I and MNSTC-I, while worthy of applause, failed to achieve its potential because MNF-I did not assert enough control or provide clear enough guidance to the corps and ultimately the division level. The changes were large but not encompassing enough. As will be seen in the next chapter, to create the necessary changes in Iraq, it would take an institutional change of immense proportions in addition to a troop surge, and a strategy rooted in honest assumptions, and nested in a logical policy.

Chapter 5

THE IRAQI INSURGENCY: THE SURGE

Introduction

By January 2007, the road toward a stable and legitimate government in Iraq was slow-going. After President Bush declared an end to major combat operations there was neglectful coordination, poor strategy, and a shortfall in resources in the theater of operations. In the first year of occupation, Lt General Ricardo Sanchez alienated himself and his staff from their civilian counterparts at CPA, as well as those at CENTCOM.[1] Characterized by one policy expert as "all trees, no forest," General Sanchez failed to provide the necessary leadership and oversight for the execution of his broad COIN plan.[2] Following the CPA debacle, General Casey paid due diligence to the sensitive nature of the situation in Iraq and, in particular, concerns within the American public about measurable progress and the time it was taking. Showing a more astute realization of the nature of the war, General Casey took measures to implement certain elements of a COIN strategy.[3] However, that effort proved to be too little, too late, and the various insurgent groups and leaders seized the opportunity to exploit the strategic CoG: the people at home and abroad. Having missed that window of opportunity, senior political and military leaders experienced mounting tensions and frustrations, leading to poor decisions in operational guidance and tactical execution. As 2006 came to a close, the mood in Baghdad and

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[1] Mark Moyar, *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 219.

[2] Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iraq's insurgency and the road to civil conflict* (Westport u.a.: Praeger Security International, 2007), 70. See also Moyar, *A Question of Command...*, 219

[3] George Casey, General, U.S. Army, interview by Martha Raddatz, "The Iraq Civil War 'Possible," Troops Reductions Less Likely," *ABC News*, 7 Aug 2006, http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/IraqCoverage/story?id=2283837&page=1

Washington was foreboding. Iraq as a failed state could have potentially catastrophic consequences regionally as well as globally.

The conflict in Iraq had evolved from former regime elements, opportunists, criminals conducting low-level into a problem of complex insurgency. Armed groups, including insurgents, terrorists, and local militias worked together and against one another to a degree of complexity that baffled even the most seasoned COIN experts. The country seemed to outside observers to be at a tipping point, or more accurately on the edge of a precipice, and U.S. military strategy in theater once again had to be revamped. The difference was that time, patience, and options seemed to be running out: this appeared to senior members of the Bush administration as the last chance to get it right.

Strategic Environment

As previous chapters have demonstrated, assessing the strategic environment is both difficult and necessary as a precursor to effective action. The environment includes factors that extend beyond the theater, including domestic and international support, foreign policy considerations, and long-term international relations. The deliberation of the individual components in and of themselves is not necessarily complicated. The challenge exists in their interconnections and resulting implications. Understanding the dynamic nature of these relationships is fundamental to recognizing the necessity of getting a strategy right up front. The events and actors must be placed in the proper context and perspective before initiating a strategy that has the potential to disrupt the status quo.

The rising violence in Iraq carried with it mounting policy implications for the Bush administration. U.S. domestic support for the war reached an all-time low, as the administration's popularity ratings continued to slide. For example, "In a *Newsweek* poll from August 10-11, 2006, 58 percent of adults [thought] the U.S. [was] *losing ground in its efforts to establish security and democracy in Iraq,* while only 31

percent [thought] we [the U.S.] were making progress."[4] Even more telling, a similar poll done by *CBS News* and the *New York Times* in July 2006 reported 53 percent of Americans believed Iraq would never become a stable democracy.[5] Equally troubling was sagging international support for the war. Since 2003, the allied coalition had dropped from 49 nations to 30, with more signaling their intent to remove their support.[6] Withdrawal of international assistance fell dangerously in line with the insurgent strategy of isolating the U.S. from its allies. According to their thinking, once insurgent groups had sufficiently separated the U.S. from the consensus and support of the international community it was only a matter of time before American forces would leave due to moral attrition. The rising casualties, financial burden, and political fallout prompted President Bush to initiate a change in national strategy in Iraq. On January 10, 2007, he announced a new strategic focus, aimed at establishing and maintaining the security of the people, combined with an increase in U.S. forces and resources.[7]

What appeared to be the only persistent feature in Iraq at the time was the uncertainty over the eventual outcome. The GOI, the people, and the armed groups within the country were components, all interconnected, creating an ambiguous setting. This ambiguity and uncertainty went hand-in-hand. There was uncertainty over who in Iraq had the monopoly on violence. GOI seemed too weak and fractured, leading the people (during the civil war) to take matters into their own hands. Simultaneously, armed groups appeared to be acting as *agents*

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[4] Steven M. Warshawsky, "Why Americans Oppose the Iraq War," *American Thinker*, September 14, 2006, http://www.americanthinker.com/2006/09/why_americans_ oppose_the_iraq.html

[5] Warshawsky, "Why Americans Oppose the Iraq War," 1.

[6] ProCon.org, "Coalition Forces in Iraq." http://usiraq.procon.org/view.resource. php?resourceID=000677.

[7] Jeanne Burington, "The Comprehensive Approach: An Iraq Case Study Operation Iraqi Freedom, January 2007 to December 2008," *JCOA Journal*, (Winter 2010), Executive Summary.

provocateurs, strategic spoilers, and defenders of local communities at the same time.[8] An example of this ambiguity was the infiltration of Iraqi police and security forces by members of JAM. Numerous killings took place by men in uniform—and it is doubtful that they were acting under official orders or sanction. As the Bush administration struggled to find the ways and means of creating stability, Iraq was on the verge of a civil war.[9] Following the AQI bombing of the Shi'ia al-Askari Mosque in Samara, sectarian fighting boiled over between Sunni Arabs and Shi'ia militias. Violence rose to levels never before seen, specifically in and around Baghdad and Anbar province. Fueled by foreign jihadists and extremists like AQI, the cumulative effects of the fighting were staggering. From October to December of 2006, enemy attacks and total deaths (civilian, coalition, and ISF) spiked to all time highs since the beginning of stabilization efforts.[10] The insurgency had grown to an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 during that period, during which over 180 daily attacks were launched, killing over 9000 civilians, 290 U.S. servicemen, and 602 ISF.[11] U.S. and coalition forces, in concert with ISF and NIA forces attempted to cap the violence, with little success. The effort to root out the extremists and militias was fierce but the *Clear, Hold, and Build* strategy failed to establish security.

The GOI had demonstrated little assistance in defusing the escalating violence. Efforts to gain legitimacy failed, as accusations of corruption ran rampant and secular politics along Shi'ia and Sunni lines interfered. Many of the insurgent groups, both Shi'ia and Sunni, had direct ties to sitting members of the Iraqi National Assembly, who were

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[8] Interview, Dr. James Kiras. 10 May 2011.

[9] Emma Sky, "Iraq, From Surge to Sovereignty," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 90, no. 2 (March/April 2011), 118.

[10] Institute for the Study of War, "Iraq Statistics for Reference, 2008." Slides 8-12, http://www.understandingwar.org/iraq-statistics-reference-december-2007

[11] Michael O'Hanlon and Jason Campbell, *Iraq Index Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2007), 8, 14, and 18.

the supporters of this corruption.[12] The fall-out from this corruption and collusion was an increasing uphill battle to establish basic human services, and provide for the hierarchy of needs of the people. Legitimacy of government was failing, adding to an already existing void in the monopoly of legitimate power. These problems were compounded by an inability to train and field enough ISF and NIA forces. These personnel were the linchpin for security, stability, and reconstruction. Without security, there could not be the requisite breathing room was non-existent for the GOI to stand on its feet and gain legitimacy in the eyes of the people. Adding to the difficult situation was the people's perception of what constituted their best interest.

The support of the people in the chaotic environment was the focus for the coalition forces, the GOI, and the enemy. More accurately stated, the people *should* have been the focus particular for GOI and coalition forces. Widespread civil unrest, lack of faith in government, and a degenerating infrastructure undermined U.S.-led reconstruction efforts. Nor had the economic state of Iraq improved since the end of the Hussein regime. Unemployment rates in 2006 ranged from 25 to 40 percent.[13] These socio-economic and political factors fanned the flames of sectarian violence and crime as familial patriarchs fought for limited means and opportunities to feed their families and tribal sheikhs sought to obtain power, influence, and resources in competition with others. The persistent and conflicting economic, political, and tribal forces acting upon the population created increasing tensions for the people, making an already strained relationship with U.S. forces, even worse. In the face

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[12] Associated Press, "Battle for Baghdad A Critical Point in the War," *MSNBC News*, 5 Oct 2006, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15145106/print/1/displaymode /1098/39932326; also Worth, Robert F. See also James Glanz, "Oil Graft Fuels the Insurgency Iraq and U.S. Say," *New York Times*, 5 February 2006, http://www.nytimes. com/2006/02/05/international/middleeast/05corrupt.html

[13] Michael O'Hanlon and Jason Campbell, *Iraq Index Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2007), *41.*

of the escalating violence that appeared to have no end, most Iraqis felt, "[U.S. and coalition forces] departure would make Iraq more secure and decrease sectarian violence."[14]

Having a firm grasp of the environment, particularly at the level of command within the theater, was fundamental to strategic success in Iraq. Situational awareness of the connected elements in the COIN environment is more critical than in a conventional conflict for multiple reasons. First, the window of opportunity to establish security, credibility, and legitimacy is small. Failing to seize that critical opportunity leads to significant consequences for COIN forces, as mentioned in previous chapters. Second, not having a functional knowledge of the sensitive linkages between the formal and informal power brokers, people, and the government leads to COIN decisions that create imbalance between these components. Lastly, the strategic environment serves as a potential sanctuary for insurgents. Not understanding the critical role the people, and their active and passive support, play in this environment could prove lethal to a COIN force. This awareness hinged on more temporal, complex, and difficult elements of information, without which operations ceased to be successful.[15] These linkages became clearer to General Petraeus as he assessed the situation. His ability to connect the components acting in the strategic environment, and recognize the forces acting upon and between them, enabled General Petraeus to articulate strategy to his planners. This articulation provided an opportunity for them to operationalize the strategy.[16] This *operationalizing*, simply put, was

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[14] Amitt R. Paley, "Most Iraqis Favor Immediate U.S. Pullout, Polls Show," *The Washington Post*, September 27, 2006, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/26/AR2006092601721.html

[15] *Jeanne Burington, "The Comprehensive Approach: An Iraq Case Study Operation Iraqi Freedom, January 2007 to December 2008," JCOA Journal, (Winter 2010), Executive Summary.*

[16] Joseph D. Celeske, "Operationlizing COIN." *JSOU Report 05-02.* (Joint Special Operations University. September 2005. 93) 24.

planners taking the commander's intellectual and conceptual notion of a COIN strategy (abstract, and nuanced in nature), and developing actionable plans, concrete LOOs, and executable actions that could be traced to objectives. In essence, it was bridging the gap between design and planning; the art and science of creating strategy. Part of this holistic approach was articulating who the enemy was, how they operated, and to what degree they were devoted to their cause. The critical piece of this approach was identifying root causes of the security failure. While some contributing factors were known, others would be discovered through exposure to the environment, from both a top-down and bottom-up perspective.[17]

The Enemy

The New Way Forward was the new strategy implemented by General Petraeus. It signified a departure from what had been one strategy derivative after another. While the long-term objectives of the strategy remained the same, the campaign concept and intellectual framework underpinning it were novel.[18] The security, political, economic Lines of Effort (LOEs) would remain mutually reinforcing.[19] However, the innovation in this strategy resided in the imperative that, "security was a prerequisite for progress in the other areas."[20] President Bush underlined the critical nature of this imperative when he stated "political progress, economic gains and security are all

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[17] *Jeanne Burington, "The Comprehensive Approach: An Iraq Case Study Operation Iraqi Freedom, January 2007 to December 2008," JCOA Journal, (Winter 2010), Executive Summary.*

[18] Catherine Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom: Strategies, Approaches, Results, and Issues for Congress*, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2008), 51.

[19] Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom...*, 51.

[20] President George W. Bush, transcript of speech to the nation, *CBS News World,* 10 January 2007. See also The U.S. Governmental Accounting Office (GAO) Report to Congressional Committees GAO-08-837, "Securing, Stabilizing, And Rebuilding Iraq Progress Report: Some Gains Made, Updated Strategy Needed," 3. http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/01/10/iraq/main2349882.shtml. See also Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom...*, 51.

intertwined...[but], unlikely absent a basic level of security...the most urgent priority for success in Iraq is security."[21] The strategy would come to be known after its other, practical element that would make security possible--the *Surge* of additional forces to help train and advise more Iraqis and work in and among the people. The President approved a surge of forces to secure the people from the enemy. By the time the forces reached their peak in October 2007, there were 168,000 U.S. troops in Iraq.[22] Augmenting the number of existing troops was critical to security, considering the adversary had diversified and at the same time, more elusive.

The nature of the conflict centered on the struggle for power, resources, and terrain.[23] The cascading effects of regime and Ba'athist party removal, and a corresponding lack of any means to provide security or law-enforcement in the country, was a catalyst for chaos in 2003. Having seized the opportunity to fill this power vacuum locally, the leaders of many insurgent groups and militias refused to submit to any order other than what they had established. Their refusal led such insurgent and militia groups to fight with the purpose of "perpetuating disorder to prevent the establishment of a legitimate democratic government."[24] In other words, local chaos and their hold on power suited goals of the leaders of such groups. Militias like al Sadr's JAM and insurgent groups such as the 1920s Brigades fought to maintain their sources of power including local support structures, resources, and populations. The fight for these sources was persistent, and even included contests over roads, entry points, rivers, and other lines of

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[21] Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom...*, 51.

[22] Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom...*, 52.

[23] Emma Sky, "Iraq, From Surge to Sovereignty," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 90, no. 2 (March/April 2011), 118.

[24] Andrew F. Krepinevich, "How to Win in Iraq." *Foreign Affairs,* (September-October, 2005), 1.

communication.[25] Through intimidation, kidnapping, and murder the insurgents attempted to undermine U.S. operations, while destabilizing efforts to stand-up a legitimate GOI.[26] As mentioned previously, the success of the insurgency was predicated on dismantling the coalition, protracting widespread violence, and eventually wearing down U.S. resolve.

The central actors in the insurgency can be delineated between various Sunni-Arab extremist groups, Shi'ia militias, and foreign fighters and movements, the most notorious of whom was Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). These groups were heavily influenced to one degree or another by outside actors, primarily Iran (Shi'ite) and Syria (Sunni-Arabs and to a lesser extent, foreign fighters). Outside actors sought to shape the region politically and economically for their own benefit as General David Petraeus suggested in testimony before Congress.[27] Common criminal elements were also a part of the insurgent equation. Local gangs or street thugs threatened neighborhoods and cities, motivated by their own narrow definitions and perception of power and influence. The violence that sprung from these groups was as dynamic and diverse as the groups themselves. David Kilcullen, a COIN expert who served as advisor to General Petraeus during the Surge, saw these dynamics at play on a daily basis. Kilcullen likened the situation to a complex and "constantly changing set of problems whose dynamic interaction drives the conflict…and requires a constant adaptations and agility of response."[28] Adaptation and agility were not words that could be used to describe U.S. operations prior to the Surge.

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[25] Kimberly Kagan, *The Surge: A Military History* (New York*:* Encounter Books, 2009), 15.

[26] Andrew F. Krepinevich, "How to Win in Iraq." *Foreign Affairs,* (September-October, 2005), 3.

[27] David Petraeus, General, U.S. Army, report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq, 8-9 April 2008.

[28] David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of A Big One* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 152.

What had started as disenfranchised Ba'athists with core elements of FREs was now a much more elaborate network of violent armed groups with intersecting battle lines and loyalties. Sunni-Shi'ia sectarian violence existed but was further complicated by the infiltration of extremists into neighborhoods and cities throughout Baghdad and to other provinces. Extremists, primarily AQI, would gain a foothold in a neighborhood, intimidate the people, and launch attacks from their new staging area.[29] This tactic gained them the active and passive support of the locals as they took action to back up their words, which in turn spread their influence as the purveyors of power and protection. Sunni extremist groups like AQI extended their attacks beyond coalition forces, and targeted ISF forces, Iraqi supporters of the ISF and coalition, and the populations of Shi'ia neighborhoods. Attacks on Shi'ia communities heavily escalated the violence and drew almost immediate responses from Shi'ia militias like JAM. Increasingly brutal responses further established groups like AQI as the only legitimate protectors and defenders of the Sunni population. Civil war loomed, as each side fought to gain a local monopoly over the use of violence and permanently fill the power vacuum in their area. AQI escalated the violence even further in February 2006, when its forces bombed the Ali al-Hadi mosque in Samarra, triggering a wave of sectarian reprisals.[30] Shortly after the bombing, Nouri al-Maliki was named the new Iraqi Prime Minister. This announcement was followed by the public proclamation of the formal establishment of the GOI and its full contingent of cabinet of ministers. By May of 2006, the rise in assassinations, kidnappings, and widespread murder underscored the chaos that encompassed Baghdad and the belts

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[29] Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla,* 153.

[30] Ellen Knickmeyer and K.I. Ibrahim, "Bombing Shatters Mosque In Iraq Attack on Shiite Shrine Sets Off Protests, Violence," *Washington Post,* February 23, 2006, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/22/AR200 6022200454.html. See also Kagan, *The Surge,* 9.

surrounding the city.[31] GOI had an elected government but little apparent ability to control the violence within its cities and towns.

The internal dynamics of the insurgency, however, shifted just prior to and during the *Surge.* Starting roughly in September of 2006, rifts in the relationship between Iraqi Sunni Arabs and AQI emerged in the al Anbar capital of Ramadi. Early in 2004 AQI lead elements arrived in al Anbar in the initial stages of U.S. occupation and asserted to the tribal sheikhs and local population that they would restore security, stability, and order to the city. What occurred, however, was wholesale murder and intimidation of tribal sheiks and their followers in AQI's bid to assert dominance. After a sustained period of a forced "puritanical form of Islam" and subjugation, Sheikh Abdul Sattar Buzaigh al-Rishawi led Sunni tribal elements in the "signing of a manifesto denouncing Al Qaeda and pledging support to coalition forces."[32] This became known as the *Sunni Awakening,* and had substantial second- and third-order effects.

The combined effects of increasingly competent U.S COIN operations and Sunni resistance to AQI extremism led to cooperation between the U.S. and Sunni Arabs. The unintended consequences of this union were expansive. First, this alliance helped allow MNF-I to shift to a population-centric approach. Planners were able to harness the unique opportunity of working with Anbari tribes against AQI. Second, the U.S./Sunni coalition phenomenon spread to other Sunni parts of the country, creating second and third order effects throughout multiple areas.[33] Third, the uprising of local segments of the population extended to Shi'ite held areas, prompting intolerance amongst Shia of the violence propagated by their own militias, death squads, and special

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[31] Kagan, *The Surge,* 9.
[32] Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom...,* 115.
[33] Sky, "Iraq, From Surge to Sovereignty,"119.

groups.[34] The dynamic circumstances surrounding the shift in loyalties and cause underscored this era in which the Surge occurred. What is pronounced in this short summary of the enemy state during this period is the action-reaction relationship. More than that, it is the uncertainty and complexity of the myriad components and their linkages that made the enemy situation a wicked problem.

The evolution of the insurgent groups, extremists, and gangs during this time was multi-faceted, involving elements that ranged from well-coordinated strategies to sophisticated tactics, techniques, and procedures that wove attacks together with very capable information operations in the form of electronic propaganda materials. The battle-space was the most complex imaginable for U.S. and coalition planners on the MNF-I staff. This complexity resulted, in part, due to the varied insurgent and militia presences amongst the different neighborhoods, cities and provinces, as well as the persistent change in security and "threat 'temperature' that [varied] on a block-by-block basis."[35]

Part of grasping the character of this insurgency was a determined effort to know the population of Iraq beyond the superficial level of "Iraqi." For all intents and purposes, the two clusters -- the people and the enemy -- were one and the same. Each person in Iraq, as mentioned in chapter two, represented gradations or degrees of insurgent. Those lying on the far left of the scale, represented the Iraq completely resistant to militias, insurgent warfare, and violent actions against the U.S. and coalition forces. Opposed to them were those on the far right of the spectrum; the extremely radical insurgent willing to inflict violence against all those opposing his cause. Between these extremes were Iraqis with varying degrees of active and passive support to either the

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[34] Jason A. Buchanan, "The Anbar Awakening: A Guide to Understanding the Descent of Islamic Fundamentalists." (Master's Thesis, San Diego State University, School of Political Science, 2010), 60. See also Sky, "Iraq, From Surge to Sovereignty," 119.
[35] Dale, *Operation Iraqi Freedom...*, 57.

U.S. forces, or the insurgents. This intimate and complex connection between the people and the insurgency were a part of what made executing an effective COIN strategy so difficult. The intricate, sometimes subtle relationships between families, clans, tribes, and ethnicities represented were just one facet of the environment in Iraq. These relationships are also what made the population so difficult for MNF-I planners to understand when they classified it as the center of gravity.

The Center of Gravity

What can be inferred from the shortcomings of senior leaders in Iraq from 2003 to 2006 is that creating, articulating, and executing strategy is difficult. One critical component of this obscure undertaking is the accurate assessment and analysis of the CoG. Curiously, from one commander to the next, their campaign strategies have remained consistent in one aspect: the promotion of the people as the CoG. The question is then, how is it that in light of this consistency, one leader would prove successful, while others fell short of the mark? Establishing where earlier breakdowns occurred is necessary for the explanation of the final success.

The Surge in essence served as a renunciation and forgiveness of the previous U.S. strategic and operational planning sins associated with fatal flaws in assumptions and incurable guidance. Both Lt General Sanchez and General Casey, through different but equally damning mistakes, allowed the U.S. to enter into a vicious cycle in Iraq that would take years to extract ourselves from.[36] Most deficient was the disconnection throughout multiple levels, amongst numerous actors, at various stages of execution. Without a firm grasp of the strategic environment and the associated actors, the requisite knowledge of what questions to ask, and how to interact with those actors was missing.

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[36] Killcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla,* 118.

U.S. forces were cut off from the people they needed to understand and protect. The strategic framework neglected to identify the importance of this interaction, and why the enemy was fighting. An even more pragmatic argument is that, in the case of General Casey, the focus rested heavily on transference of power and security to the GOI, as opposed to first establishing security of the population.[37] This top down approach was focused on a quick exit strategy, while simultaneously being risk averse and minimizing casualties. Had logic prevailed in the establishment of this strategy in 2004, the decision-makers would have known that stabilization could not occur prior to, or even with security.

From 2003-2006, the CoG was proclaimed to be *the people.* In reality, based on commander guidance, and execution, it was either stabilization and governance, or the enemy. For General Casey, the one central figure that he perceived was standing in his way of transitioning power and responsibility to the GOI, was the enemy.[38] They would not allow him to disengage successfully and declare victory in Iraq. What transpired was a conventional army that fell back on what it knew best: kinetic operations engaged in major conventional operations. Establishing FOBs, decayed an already sub-standard level of situational awareness to the point where tactical units and their commanders treated all Iraqis as the enemy. These barriers represented more than just a physical wall between the people and the forces there to protect them.[39] They served as a stumbling block to building personal relationships, critical intelligence links, and achieving the active and passive support of the people. The paradox of General Casey's strategy

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[37] Burington, "The Comprehensive Approach: An Iraq Case Study," Executive Summary.

[38] Heather S. Gregg, Hy S. Rothstein and John Arquilla, *The Three Circles of War: Understanding the Dynamics of Conflict in Iraq* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2010), 48.

[39] Killcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla,* 124. See also Kagan, *The Surge,* 31.

specifically, is that the people identified as the strategic CoG, the hub of all power and movement, were the ones most alienated by his strategy.

General Petraeus would illustrate in 2007 that successful COIN campaigns required more than linear flow charts, predicated upon traditional biases and conventional norms. Underpinning the Surge was a different intellectual mindset to bridge the gap between concept and application of COIN. What had yet to be seen was a way to operationalize abstract and nuanced concepts into actionable guidance at the corps and division levels. The foundation of General Petraeus' success lie first in his ability to grasp exceptionally difficult concepts associated with COIN, reduce them to their constituent parts, and articulate them in a manner in which they can be acted upon.[40] The second component was the practical and pragmatic support he received. This component was at the corps level, at MNC-I. General Petraeus was fortunate in having Maj General Raymond Odierno in charge of MNC-I. Odierno had several qualities that suited him for the job: practical experience in COIN, a demonstrated flexibility of mind shown in his ability to assess the shortcomings of his first tour in Iraq and take a different approach during his next rotation, and a unique ability to take MNF-I's concepts and ideas and operationalize them.[41] While the surge of troops was critical to success, it was how they were used and for what purpose that was crucial. Through detailed coordination and communication, MNF-I and MNC-I concentrated their forces effectively and secured people in the most contested areas.   They did this through flooding the enemy sanctuaries and driving insurgent groups and militias out of their operating areas. The strengths stemmed from a conceptual framework of coherent LOEs, prioritized around the primacy of security. Troops were out amongst the people, as opposed to being cut off behind the walls of

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[40] Robinson, Tell Me *How This Ends,* 348.
[41] Kagan, *The Surge,* 201.

Super FOBs.[42] A fusion of bottom-up and top-down coordination facilitated the feedback, adjustment, and iterative planning process allowing for seamless passage of lessons learned throughout the AO. In addition to the coordination within the military hierarchy, Petraeus and others worked hard to ensure a similar degree of collaboration existed within the joint force and among the various elements of the interagency. At the highest level, and arguably most importantly, General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker worked together and led by example.[43] A unified approach to strategy and objectives flowed down to troops, provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs), and other interagency team members. Without this unprecedented unity of effort the level of success would not be near what it is today.

General Petraeus and his staff were able to pull significantly from ideas that had already been enshrined in the literature on COIN. Much of what was implemented had been tested in several COIN conflicts over a period of decades.[44] What MNF-I had done during the Surge was contextualize best-practices and lessons learned in their specific environments and not try and replicate them blindly. The application of indirect versus a direct approach to both the insurgency and the population was a prime example of COIN doctrine in action throughout this stage of U.S. operations. Forces focused on long-term, strategic gains, and accepted the level of risk associated with working within and among the population, as opposed to short-term, battlefield victories against the enemy. General Petraeus was able to embrace the complexity of the situation he found himself in based on practical and intellectual experience. He succeeded where others failed by conveying logic to

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[42] Joel Arends, "Report From Iraq: Results and Lessons From the Surge," Research Project, *Veterans for Freedom,* (October 2008), 8-9. See also Kagan, *The Surge,* 32.
[43] Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends,* 349.
[44] Robert F. McLaughlin, "Counterinsurgency and the Surge in Iraq: Balancing Doctrine and Strategy." (Strategic Research Project, U.S. Army War College, 2009), 6. See also Killcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla,* 129.

political leaders responsible for making the critical decisions at the national level. He was honest in his assessment about resources required, expectations and assumptions, and most importantly the risk. General Petraeus, and those under his charge were willing to accept short-term risk, for a long term, continuous strategic advantage in Iraq. Arguably, the objectives were met through a successful use of concepts, operational art, tactics, techniques, and procedures in a manner best suited to the dynamic environment. The culmination of both theory and practice yielded uncontested results by the summer of 2008.

Summary

Throughout the search for a positive outcome in Iraq, commanders struggled with the challenges of determining the right blend of control and guidance, resources, organization, interagency cooperation, and force. What resulted was a pendulum swing. First, the pendulum swung left, with an extreme focus on decentralized, bottom-up popular support. The lack of oversight and guidance from Lt General Sanchez led to catastrophic failures in establishing security for the people in Iraq. After less than a year of Lt General Sanchez grasping at what the correct solution was, he was replaced by General Casey, representing the pendulum swing to the right. With the benefit of watching the enemy threat grow over the last year, General Casey recognized the existence of a significant threat in Iraq. Unfortunately, policy direction from the White House, and General Casey's unwillingness and inability to grasp the strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of CoG led to a traditional, conventional, kinetic approach to accomplishing his task. Enemy-centric in his approach, and top-down in his guidance, General Casey sought to establish a legitimate government in Iraq, stabilize the country, defeat the insurgency, and minimize U.S. casualties simultaneously. His pendulum swing represented his inability to see the proverbial forest through the trees, not understanding the need to secure the people first, before all else. Eventually finding equilibrium between the two extremes,

General Petraeus put in practice the COIN concept of securing the people first. Having established that necessity with senior policy makers, articulating the risk, expectations and assumptions associated with the complex problem, he was able to proceed with far greater chances of success than his predecessors. As has been shown, the core idea of the strategy and the overall objectives in Iraq changed very little, if at all, from 2003 to 2008. Ultimately what made the Surge successful was its holistic approach to a complex problem in a chaotic environment. General Petraeus differed from other commanders before him in a few ways, as had been discussed here. In the end, what is certain is that General Petraeus bridged a gap between theory and practice with CoG and COIN. He was able to identify the critical linkages between the environment, the enemy, and the people. More importantly, his success suggests a more deep-rooted weakness in the American military profession of arms. The long road to success in Iraq revealed that strategy and accurately assessing a strategic CoG in a COIN environment is complex because it is foreign to the institutions that make up the military services. The organizational cultures associated with combat arms and warfare inhibit creativity and prevent long-held paradigms from being questioned. While not suggesting a wholesale revamping of design and joint operational planning, there is much more to lose by not questioning existing processes and models, remaining curious, and constantly asking *why.*

Conclusions

It is so damn complex. If you ever think you have the solution to this, you're wrong, and you're dangerous. You have to keep listening and thinking and being critical and self-critical.

-- *Colonel H.R. McMaster*

The world was introduced to Clausewitz's theory of war in *On War* in 1832. This seminal work on theory and strategy presented its ideas in terms of contrast between the dual nature of war: war in theory and war in reality, or practice. He used the device of Hegelian dialectic, in which an idea is contrasted with its opposite to arrive at a higher truth, to divine's war's true nature and purpose. Clausewitz utilized a number of tools, including metaphors, to help explain why war in practice was so difficult to comprehend and master. One of the most famous metaphors he used was CoG, which was derived from Newtonian physics. Defined by Clausewitz at the strategic level as "the hub of all power and movement," CoG has for centuries served as a means to communicate simply the focus or objective against which one should concentrate military force and effort.[1] Because CoG had different definitions according to the level of war—in particular a theoretical single CoG versus multiple operational or tactical ones—the concept has undergone multiple interpretations in an attempt to further simplify, extract, and use it as a planning tool to aid in the development and execution of strategy. While these interpretations do provide structure and organization to strategic challenges, they have in some cases become doctrinal or dogmatic. The profession of arms has taken the concept of CoG and developed linear flowcharts and processes from it. CoG has become the means by which to reduce the complexity of conventional

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[1] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 595.

military operations and strategy into a simple point of focus and effort. Yet that identification of a single point of focus and effort can become a self-reinforcing prophecy when it remains unchallenged in the face of conflicting information. It can become a planning and execution crutch for the commander. Many of the same problems in conceptualizing and oversimplifying CoG also apply in US efforts to understand and combat insurgency.

Insurgency is a complex form of warfare in its own right given the challenges it presents politically and militarily. It cannot be defeated by military means alone, despite the demonstrated preference of conventional officers repeatedly to try. Oddly, despite being waged for centuries across the globe, insurgencies lack a depth and breadth of theories to explain them. Both Mao Tse Tung and Che Guevara wrote works on insurgency that discuss theory and strategy. Outside of their works, there are few other theoretical offerings that provide much in the way of deeper understanding on the unique nature of irregular warfare. This lack of theory, or other structured investigation, has been misinterpreted historically by many who perceive insurgencies as a lesser form of war, disorganized, lacking purpose, strength, and thereby any significant threat to a conventional military power. This perceived weakness in the face of military power is an unfortunate and mistaken assumption that insurgent leaders have exploited time and again. In their haste to meet and defeat the enemy on the field of battle, those countering insurgents have overlooked or underestimated the value and function of the population as the key constituency and commodity that determines the outcome.

Almost all insurgency experts agree that if there is a CoG in insurgency it is the people. Too often the concept of "the people" has been reduced to an abstract monolith, a mythical entity, which must be swayed through the magic prescription of *winning their hearts and minds.* In addition, the assessment or understanding of what to do,

much less how to do it in a way that garners support, stops at this trite level of analysis. The true nature of an insurgency, which is complex, adaptive, and dynamic, lies beneath these aphorisms and is often only uncovered after years of frustration, muddling, and expenditure of blood and treasure. The "people" are not one but many constituents and their loyalty and support, as David Galula reminds us, is conditional and based on circumstances that change locally, regionally, and nationally. No insurgency can be won or defeated without the support of the people. Without passive and active support, insurgencies lack sanctuary, power and influence, and resources to mobilize. This nuanced understanding of the shape and character of insurgency, which resembles an amoeba in its ability to change according to conditions in the environment, is difficult to grasp for political and military leaders who still envision war as a contest between opposing armies. U.S. political and military leaders either wholly or partially were unable to grasp such subtleties in Iraq and, in consequence, they were always a step behind the developments within the irregular operating environment.

The insurgency in Iraq from 2003-2008 clearly illustrates the danger associated with an over-reliance on unchecked assumptions, archaic institutional biases, and a lack of intellectual flexibility. After the declaration of the cessation of major combat operations, Lt General Sanchez, CJTF-7, and the CPA allowed the insurgency to grow in size, its violent character, and intensity. A year later, the U.S. response to the growing insurgency showed little change, as General Casey and MNF-I demonstrated little requisite knowledge of CoG as a theoretical tool, or its constituent parts and characteristics. As the conflict progressed from one year to the next, the insurgents and various armed groups reflected an ability to adapt and remain fluid in their means and methods of waging war. The same cannot be said about U.S. and coalition forces. While U.S. strategy and application of CoG did evolve, the progression was always one step behind developments that were taking place within

the insurgency. These initial lag pursuits were enough to create a level of chaos within Iraq, and seeming incompetence and bumbling by U.S. and coalition leaders, for the first four years of the COIN effort.

U.S. Commanders' perceptions and assumptions of the people and the enemy led first to fatal delays in execution and then to gross errors in analysis and interpretation. A failure at the strategic level of war to understand the role CoG played in a COIN environment underscored fatal mistakes that permeated the subordinate levels of war. The situation demanded intellectual rigor throughout all levels of command in war in order to identify and then take action against the critical linkages that existed between the government, the people, and the enemy. It was not until General Petraeus arrived in Iraq as MNF-I commander that he was able to unify the command structure, solving one problem of action, and inspire a coherent vision and understanding of the insurgency. From practical experience and intellectual study, General Petraeus, MNF-I, and its subordinate commands were able to clearly articulate the critical components of the insurgency, its connection to the people, and the emergent properties of their interactions. This led to a significant change in strategy and approach to the people as the CoG that facilitated this reversal of fortune. The realization that success ultimately resided in securing the people before all else made the difference in Iraq. This radical departure from norms and doctrine proved to be the recipe for a more stable Iraq. The three stages of U.S. COIN strategy evolution in Iraq (CPA, Divided Command, and the Surge) and their associated results reflect how leaders and strategists see what they want to see, based off what they are trained to see.[2]

Implications

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[2] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution,* 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 113.

The principal question that remains to be answered is whether CoG is an effective conceptual tool for understanding and combating insurgencies. This thesis concludes that CoG can be valuable and effective but with provisions. First, CoG is effective only if the analytical process on which it is derived has first asked and answered appropriate questions. Adapting the Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace (IPB) to the nature of the war is critical. Relevant questions in a COIN environment differ from those in a conventional one. Having a keen awareness of the socio-political, economic, tribal, and cultural aspects of the environment is fundamental to effective CoG analysis. Second, in the determination and application of CoG, strategists must understand its limits. What is often forgotten is that CoG is *a* tool, not *the* tool in the development of sound strategy. It is a scientific metaphor based on physics conceptualized to suit the uncertainty of war. That being said, CoG has undergone multiple translations, interpretations, and efforts to simplify it for use in the planning process. In the process, many of the theoretical and abstract elements that make it useful have been lost. Clausewitz was not prescribing how to use CoG. Rather the message of *On War* in general, the concept of CoG specifically, was designed to shape people's minds on *how* to think about war as opposed to *what* to think. By restoring CoG as a conceptual means of understanding, and not a dogmatic answer or targeting solution, planners will be able to bridge the gap between concept and application and then use it to further crystallize thinking about the insurgent environment at the operational level and below.

What links CoG and insurgency to one another is the attempt to add structure and certainty to a subject that by its very essence must remain ambiguous and without form. Insurgencies are wicked problems, best related by Tom Ritchey when he states:

> "…ill-defined, ambiguous and… [where] there is often little consensus about what the problem *is*, let alone how to

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resolve it. Furthermore, wicked problems won't keep still: they are sets of complex, interacting issues evolving in a dynamic social context. Often, new forms of wicked problems emerge *as a result* of trying to understand and solve one of them."[3]

As seen throughout the case study exploration of Iraq, where U.S. conventional operations struggled, the disparate components of the insurgency thrived. The two forms of warfare were at odds with one another, with the insurgents more capable of adapting to the chaotic environment. The adaptive nature of insurgent leaders, whose survival was contingent on the support of local populations, led them to conclude intuitively that the security and control of the people was their functional and, in some sense, strategic CoG. By identifying the underlying components of what made up *the people*, as opposed to oversimplifying it, the insurgents were able to establish a foothold and fill a power vacuum that served as a source of security and some stability. What can be implied from the case study, and insurgencies in general, is that every question, consideration, and application of force must be done with the people as the critical concern.

From the shared characteristics of CoG and insurgency it is possible to identify their emergent properties. These properties are revealed in the three themes that run throughout this work; complexity, adaptability, and dynamism. As CoG and insurgency intersected, those shared characteristics converged, resulting in effects and consequences whose net impact was greater than the sum of its parts.

Recommendations

This thesis concludes with answers to the questions posed in the Introduction and provides some recommendations based on observations which resulted from their exploration. The questions, which are related,

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[3] Tom Ritchey, *Wicked Problems, Social Messes: Decision Support Modeling with Morphological Analysis* (Stockholm, Sweden: Ritchey Consulting, 2010), 2.

attempt to assess the value or utility of CoG as a conceptual tool in insurgencies. Those questions were:

- Is there a CoG in insurgency;
- If there is a CoG in insurgency, how can one find it; and
- Once found, what use is it?

The preceding enquiry suggests that the people constitute the strategic CoG in a COIN conflict. As the discussion above suggests, this "blinding flash of the obvious" is much discussed but rarely understood. Locating or, more accurately, assessing the CoG and its component elements requires an evaluation of their critical factors. As Chapter 1 outlined, such factors include critical capabilities, vulnerabilities, and requirements. Identifying these factors, much like understanding them, is simple in theory but difficult in practice. Correctly identifying those factors, and understanding their cultural significance and political relationships, are crucial in determining how best to influence the CoG. Linking the factors together in a cohesive, coherent approach that ties together security, stability, governance, and basic human needs and services, must be done under the constraints of time, resources, and national will. While all of the lines of effort are important in linking together the local popular spokes to the hub of the COIN fight, establishing security in which the local population has a stake and an interest is the most crucial consideration of all.

Recommendations provided here are for the sole purpose of trying to improve how strategists and planners prepare for future wars, both conventional and irregular. First, officers and select non-commissioned officers need to be educated on how to think, not what to think. My hope is that what's taken from this is not that it's about the difference between COIN and conventional warfare. The difference is inconsequential. What is imperative is the ability to critically think and assess in a problem solving environment that is constantly evolving. Knowing what to ask is

arguably more important than the answer that's given, if for nothing other than the ensuing debate and intellectual rigor that spawns from such questions. Understanding the causal linkages between theory and practice, the levels of war, and the complex transitions between them serves as the bedrock for critical thinking and solving wicked problems.

Along with the recommendation for continued pursuit of advanced education, an important acknowledgment at the senior leader levels within and between the services needs to occur. This acknowledgment is that which stresses that service culture is not synonymous with rigid predisposition and institutional norms. Group think and followership have their places in military culture, as they should. Strategy should not be one of those places. Perceptions and biases tainted assumptions and expectations in Iraq for four years before strong leadership and intellectual insightfulness created the needed change. Accompanied with that insight by the leadership was strong direction and a value put on the importance of communication. Lastly, a renewed emphasis must be placed on communicating guidance and intent. While a certain level of purposeful ambiguity is expected and warranted to allow for effective decentralization, too much vagueness in guidance can lead to disaster. The battlefield is uncertain enough before the first action is taken; it is intolerable to accept anything less than clear and indisputable strategic guidance. In the future, when a task-force commander identifies the strategic CoG as the people, it should be accompanied by a well articulated campaign plan, nested in the fundamentals of COIN doctrine, and predicated upon having answered the hard questions.

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